

HISTORY OF INDIA -III **(MAKING OF INDIAN NATION)**

COURSE CODE: B21HS07DC

Discipline Core Course
Under Graduate Programme in History
Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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History of India -III

(Making of Indian Nation)

Course Code: B21HS07DC

Semester- VI

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For Undergraduate Programme in History
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(with Model Question Paper Sets)**



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History of India -III (Making of Indian Nation)

Course Code: B21HS07DC

Semester- VI

Discipline Core Course
for Undergraduate Programme in History

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Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-03-2026

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BLOCK

Consolidation of British Power in India



UNIT

Background of Colonialism – English East India Company

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify the major European trading companies that came to India
- ◆ explain the nature of activities carried out by different European trading companies in India
- ◆ describe the formation of the English East India Company and the early stages of its trade in India
- ◆ analyse the concept of colonialism and its different forms and manifestations

Prerequisite

The roots of Indian history are often traced to the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished in the north-western parts of the subcontinent and laid the foundations of urban life, trade, and administration. Over the centuries, this land witnessed the rise and fall of many kingdoms and empires. By the time European powers arrived, the Mughal Empire, which had once provided political unity, was in decline, leaving behind a fragmented political landscape.

From the late sixteenth century onwards, European trading companies began to arrive on India's coasts in search of profitable trade. The Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English competed intensely for control over markets in spices, textiles, and other valuable goods. What began as commercial rivalry gradually turned into political and military intervention.

In this struggle, the English East India Company eventually gained the upper hand. By exploiting local rivalries and the weaknesses of Indian states after the decline of Mughal authority, the Company expanded its influence far beyond trade. Over time, it established political control over much of the subcontinent. British

rule, which lasted for nearly two centuries, was maintained through a combination of administrative control and strategies such as dividing local powers against one another. Understanding this process is essential to grasp how colonial rule took shape in India.

Keywords

East India Company, Colonialism, Mercantilism, Laissez-faire, Finance Imperialism, Diwani

Discussion

1.1.1 India on the Eve of European Invasion

Indian Subcontinent was divided into many kingdoms and princely states, including the Delhi Sultanate, Ahom Kingdom, Vijayanagara Empire, Gajapati Empire, Deccan Sultanates, Chitradurga Kingdom, Garhwal Kingdom, Mysore Kingdom, Keladi Kingdom, and the states of Travancore, Cochin, and Kozhikode during the medieval period. The political situation was more or less similar during the Mughal period. Although the Mughals established political control over most of northern and central India, the southern regions remained outside their authority. As a result, the Arabian Sea coast was left relatively open to foreign traders and invaders, as there was no strong, unified power in south-western India.

Moreover, the Vijayanagara Empire welcomed European traders, hoping to use them to counter the growing influence of the Mughals in the south. Therefore, when the Portuguese arrived at Kozhikode, the rulers of Vijayanagara extended their support to them.

The Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama discovered a new sea route from Europe to India after the traditional Silk Route through

Constantinople was disrupted by the Turks. Sailing from Lisbon around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope, he reached Kozhikode in 1498. Soon, the Portuguese established trading settlements at Calicut, Cochin, Cannanore, Daman, Salsette, Chaul, and Bombay on the west coast, as well as at San Thome near Madras and Hooghly in Bengal. In 1510, they captured Goa, which became the headquarters of Portuguese possessions in India. For over a hundred years, the Portuguese remained the dominant naval power in the Indian Ocean. However, the political support they had enjoyed from the Vijayanagara Empire ended after its defeat in 1565, marking the beginning of Portuguese decline in India. Despite this decline, they retained control over Goa, Daman, Diu, and Nagar Haveli until 1961.

The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch East India Company and the French East India Company, both of which established trading settlements in various parts of India. In 1741, the Dutch were defeated by Marthanda Varma of Travancore in the Battle of Colachel. Gradually, they lost their Indian possessions to the British, and after their defeat by the English in the Battle of Chinsurah in 1759, they withdrew from India and shifted their focus to Indonesia. The



French East India Company faced a similar fate. The military strength and political backing of Britain gave the English East India Company a decisive advantage. The Carnatic Wars and the Battle of Wandiwash in 1760 brought an end to French political influence in India, although the French continued to maintain a presence in Pondicherry, Mahe, and Karaikal until 1954.

1.1.2 Colonialism

This section presents a brief discussion of colonialism. To begin with, it is useful to distinguish between colonialism and imperialism. The term imperialism refers to a process of capitalist expansion in which advanced capitalist countries seek to conquer and dominate pre-capitalist regions of the world. It is used to describe the politico-economic relationship between a dominant capitalist country and a subordinate one. Colonialism, on the other hand, refers to the complete system of imperial domination exercised over a dependent country. It involves the process by which a foreign power takes full or partial political control of another territory, its people, and its resources. In short, colonialism is a political and economic system in which a foreign power governs and exploits another country.

1.1.2.1 Nature of Colonialism

Colonisation is based on the idea of cultural hierarchy and racial or civilisational superiority. At its core, it involves domination by a metropolitan centre over a distant territory, often through the establishment of settlements. It represents the long-term control of a territory by a sovereign power over a subordinate region. Subordination is the primary feature of colonialism: a dominant country exercises authority over a dependent one, shaping their relationship. Domination follows, whereby the colonial power reshapes the culture, society, economy,

and political institutions of the subordinate country.

Exploitation is another central feature. The colonial power extracts resources for its own benefit without providing equivalent returns to the colony. The economic drain during British rule in India is a clear example. Another characteristic is the absence of reciprocity. The settlers and administrators of the colonial power remained outsiders, serving primarily as instruments of domination and economic extraction. The colony, in contrast, exerted little or no influence on the metropolitan country.

In essence, colonialism led to a fundamental transformation of the colonised country. Its resources were made available for the benefit of the capitalist power. While the metropolis and the colony were linked within a single economic system, the colony was integrated into global capitalism without being allowed to develop its own modern productive capacities. In fact, colonial rule often obstructed the growth of indigenous capitalist development.

1.1.2.2 Stages of Colonialism

Colonialism did not follow a single, uniform pattern; instead, it developed through several stages. Although subordination and exploitation remained constant, the forms of control changed over time. In India, British colonialism passed through three major stages in response to changes within global capitalism: Mercantilism (1757–1813), Laissez-faire (1813–1860), and Finance Imperialism (1860–1947). Each stage had its own distinctive features, though exploitation remained its central characteristic.

a. Mercantilism (1757–1813):

This early phase was marked by trade monopoly, political conquest, and large-scale plunder. The primary aim of the East

India Company was to secure monopoly control over Indian trade. During this period, revenue collected from Indians was used to purchase Indian goods at low prices and sell them at high profits abroad. There were few changes in the agrarian system or colonial administration, as such changes were unnecessary for this form of exploitation. The main changes occurred in military organisation and revenue administration to ensure more efficient extraction of wealth. A significant drain of Indian resources to Britain occurred during this stage, helping to finance Britain's Industrial Revolution.

b. Laissez-faire (1813–1860):

This phase is often described as the period of free trade. British industrialists demanded open access to Indian markets after the Industrial Revolution. They wanted India to supply cheap raw materials and serve as a market for British manufactured goods. Political control over the Company was strengthened through measures such as the Regulating Act of 1773 and Pitt's India Act of 1784, and in 1813 the Company lost its trade monopoly. India was transformed into an exporter of raw materials and an importer of British goods. Agrarian systems such as the Permanent Settlement and Ryotwari were introduced, and modern education was promoted to create a workforce suited to colonial administration and economic needs.

c. Finance Imperialism (1860–1947):

This stage was marked by large-scale foreign investment and intensified competition among European powers for colonies. Britain began reinvesting a small portion of the capital it had earlier extracted from India, particularly in railways and infrastructure, to facilitate trade and resource extraction. Administrative control became more centralised and bureaucratic. While some development occurred, it was

largely aimed at serving British economic and strategic interests. By this stage, India had been severely weakened by prolonged economic drain.

In all three stages, the fundamental objective of British rule remained the extraction of Indian resources for the benefit of Britain. Although certain institutions and facilities were introduced, they primarily served colonial interests. The long-term effect was severe damage to India's economy and society, the consequences of which continued long after the end of colonial rule.

1.1.3 The English East India Company

The English East India Company, commonly known as the East India Company, was a British trading company based in London. It was also informally called the John Company. Originally a joint-stock company, it was founded in 1600 to trade with the East Indies, particularly China and India. On 31 December 1600, it received a Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth I, granting it the exclusive right to trade with all regions east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Straits of Magellan for a period of fifteen years.

The Company's first voyage to the East took place in 1601 under Sir James Lancaster, and its first factory was established at Bantam on the island of Java, in present-day Indonesia. In 1608, Sir William Hawkins arrived at Surat, marking the beginning of English commercial presence in India. He spent two years at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir but failed to secure significant trade privileges. Later, Sir Thomas Roe, who arrived as the ambassador of King James I in 1615, succeeded in obtaining royal permission from Jahangir for the Company to reside in India and establish trading factories, especially at Surat.



while those by whom its affairs were directed continued, in their individual capacities, to be without power or political influence.” (Charles Dickens, 1837)

From the previous section, you have learned about the arrival of the East India Company in India. From its initial position as a trading company, it eventually became a powerful political entity that ruled vast areas of the subcontinent. It exercised military power through its own private armies and carried out administrative functions through its organisational departments. This joint-stock company, the English East India Company, whose owners were London businessmen, survived for more than 250 years. Its detailed administrative and organisational structure was a key factor in the Company's long-standing presence. Scholars have noted that, irrespective of its size, a business entity must have formal systems for task completion, decision-making, and communication aligned with its needs in order to operate efficiently and effectively (Sebastian Kortmann, 2012). As a profit-oriented organisation, the East India Company was no exception to this principle.

Court of Directors

The apex body in the administrative hierarchy was the Court of Directors. The entire administration of the East India Company in England was managed by a group of directors known as the Court of Directors. This body consisted of 24 directors who were elected annually by the shareholders of the Company. The collective body of all shareholders who participated in electing directors was called the Court of Proprietors, or the General Court. The General Court comprised all shareholders with voting rights, and therefore its interests were largely shaped by investors seeking profits and dividends.

“The East India Company is, or rather was, an anomaly without a parallel in the history of the world. It originated from subscriptions, trifling in amount, of a few private individuals. It gradually became a commercial body with gigantic resources and, by the force of unforeseen circumstances, assumed the form of a sovereign power,



The Court of Directors included a Governor, a Deputy Governor, and twenty-four other directors elected by the General Court. The regular functioning of the Company was carried out by different committees appointed by the Court. There were several specialised committees responsible for functions such as accounting, correspondence, shipping, treasure, warehousing, and private trade, which advised and assisted the Governor. The Court of Directors was primarily responsible for decision-making and its enforcement. It made all major policy decisions and directed the Company's operations, subject to the approval of the General Court. The full Court and its subcommittees held regular meetings, often weekly, to review the functioning of the Company and guide its activities.

The Governor / Governor-General

The colonial possessions and territories of the Company were administered locally by a Governor or Governor-General. Governors were appointed by the Court of Directors and were required to submit regular reports on administration to the Court. They represented the Company in their respective territories and were assisted by an executive council of five to ten members, which had advisory and deliberative functions.

When the East India Company acquired the revenue-collection (*Diwani*) and judicial (*Nizamat*) rights in Bengal in 1765, it administered the region through a post known as the Governor of Bengal. The first widely recognised Governor of Bengal in this context was Robert Clive. As the Company expanded, the Presidencies of Bombay and Madras also had Governors appointed to administer those regions.

The Regulating Act of 1773 brought significant changes to Company administration. It transformed the office of the Governor of Bengal into the office of Governor-General

of Bengal and provided for a council to assist him. The Governor-General of Bengal became the senior authority in India, and the Governors of Bombay and Madras were made subordinate to him. Later, the Charter Act of 1833 further reformed the structure, renaming the office of Governor-General of Bengal as the Governor-General of India, with Lord William Bentinck becoming the first to hold this title under the new designation.

The Army

The East India Company maintained its own private army, separate from the regular British Army, which played a central role in its expansion and rule in India. Each of the Company's three administrative Presidencies - Bengal, Madras, and Bombay raised and maintained its own army, known collectively as the presidency armies. These forces were not part of the British Army but were organised on similar hierarchical and professional lines, with British officers and Indian sepoys (soldiers) under their command.

Initially, the Company's military forces were small and focused on protecting trade settlements. However, from the mid-18th century onwards, especially after its victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the acquisition of the *Diwani* rights in 1765, the Company expanded its armies significantly. These forces later played a major role in territorial expansion, defending trade interests, and extending British influence across India. Robert Clive is credited with advocating the recruitment of native sepoy battalions, which were formed first in Bengal, followed by Madras (from 1759) and Bombay (from 1767). These armies were composed of Indian sepoys alongside European units, organised into infantry, cavalry, and artillery regiments. By the early nineteenth century, the Company's armies had grown into one of the largest standing forces in the world, with a mixture of European and native troops. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the



British Crown assumed direct control of India and its military forces. The European units of the Company's armies were incorporated into the British Army, and the native presidency armies continued to exist under

British authority until they were reorganised. In 1895, the separate presidency armies were finally abolished, and a unified Indian Army was formed.

Recap

- ◆ Medieval India functioned without a unified political authority
- ◆ Regional polities shaped fragmented patterns of political power
- ◆ Mughal sovereignty remained limited in peninsular India
- ◆ Maritime vulnerability facilitated early European commercial entry
- ◆ Vijayanagara diplomacy encouraged European presence for strategic balance
- ◆ Colonialism institutionalised political domination and economic exploitation
- ◆ British rule adapted to changing phases of global capitalism
- ◆ Economic drain remained central to colonial governance mechanisms
- ◆ Commercial enterprises gradually assumed sovereign administrative functions
- ◆ Organised military structures enabled the Company's territorial consolidation

Objective Questions

1. Which South Indian empire supported Portuguese traders against expanding Mughal influence?
2. Which battle marked the political ascendancy of the English East India Company?
3. Which Mughal farman significantly enhanced Company trade privileges in India?

4. Which European power initially dominated Indian Ocean maritime trade networks?
5. Which stage of colonialism emphasised monopoly trade and systematic plunder?
6. What revenue-collecting right did the Company receive in Bengal in 1765?
7. Which British parliamentary act created the office of Governor-General of Bengal?
8. Which military defeat compelled the Dutch to withdraw from Indian affairs?
9. Which colonial phase prioritised foreign capital investment in infrastructure development?
10. Which Mughal emperor granted permission for English trading factories in India?

Answers

1. Vijayanagara Empire
2. Battle of Plassey
3. Farrukhsiyar's farman
4. Portuguese
5. Mercantilism
6. *Diwani*
7. Regulating Act
8. Battle of Chinsurah
9. Finance Imperialism
10. Jahangir

Assignments

1. Discuss the political and economic conditions of India on the eve of European intervention.
2. Critically examine the nature and defining features of colonialism in the Indian context.
3. Analyse the stages of British colonialism in India with reference to global capitalism.
4. Explain how the English East India Company evolved from a trading body into a ruling power.

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Suggested Reading

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UNIT

Indian States and British Paramountcy

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the process of political expansion and consolidation of the English East India Company in India
- ◆ examine and distinguish the strategies used by the English East India Company to acquire and legitimise political power
- ◆ analyse the impact of colonial policies on Indian princely states and their political autonomy
- ◆ differentiate between the major colonial policies and processes through which British control was established in India

Prerequisite

In the previous unit, you learned about the background to the advent of Europeans in India, the formation of the English East India Company, and the process and stages of colonialism in India. This unit now examines the political condition of India during the period of East India Company rule. It offers a detailed discussion of the circumstances and events that transformed a trading company into a ruling empire in India. The Company acquired political power through a variety of strategies, including war, conquest, diplomacy, and alliances. It initially exploited the mutual rivalries among the princely states by engaging in wars and later consolidated its position through carefully designed strategic policies. To understand how the English East India Company rose to political paramountcy in India, a careful study of these developments is essential.

The English East India Company governed India through two distinct administrative systems: the British provinces and the Indian princely states. Approximately 60 per cent of the territory of British India consisted of provinces directly administered by the colonial government, while the remaining 40 per cent comprised princely states. The provinces were under direct British rule, whereas the princely states were semi-autonomous native states governed by hereditary rulers. Although the historical origins of these princely states can be traced back to the fifth and sixth centuries, the term '*princely state*' is primarily used to denote the semi-sovereign principalities that existed on the Indian subcontinent during the British Raj.

The most powerful native states and empires were brought under Company control through direct conquest, achieved via a series of wars. The Carnatic Wars, the Anglo-Mysore Wars, the Anglo-Maratha Wars, and the Anglo-Sikh Wars collectively paved the way for the East India Company's political domination over the Indian states. In the following sections, we shall examine in detail the transformation of the Company from a '*trader to ruler*' in India.

Keywords

Carnatic wars, Battle of Plassey, Battle of Buxar, Anglo-Mysore wars, Anglo-Maratha wars, Anglo-Sikh wars, Diwani, Treaty of Allahabad.

Discussion

1.2.1 English East India Company as a Trader

The initial and fundamental role of the English East India Company (EIC) in India was that of a *trading enterprise* engaged in open commerce. For this purpose, the Company received permission from the British Crown through the Royal Charter of 1600. However, after establishing trading settlements and fortified commercial centres at several strategic locations in India, the Company gradually began to display political ambitions as well. The phase during which the Company transformed from a trading body into a ruling authority represents a

crucial stage in the development of capitalist colonialism in India.

The early voyages of the Company proved highly profitable. For instance, during its tenth voyage in 1611, the Company earned a return of 148 per cent on shareholders' capital. Despite these early successes, the Company faced intense competition from the Dutch and the Portuguese during its formative years. Nevertheless, these challenges did not prevent its rapid expansion. By the late seventeenth century, the Company had developed into a well-organised capitalist monopoly, emerging as one of the most powerful private commercial enterprises in history.

The major European trading companies were largely interested in purchasing the same commodities from India. Fine varieties of Indian cotton and silk enjoyed strong demand in European markets, while spices such as pepper, cloves, cardamom, and cinnamon were also highly sought after. Competition among European trading companies drove up procurement prices, thereby reducing profit margins. Consequently, the urge to eliminate rivals and secure exclusive markets led to frequent conflicts and intense rivalry among these companies.

Following Emperor Jahangir's concession granting trade privileges in 1611, the Company initially pursued peaceful commercial activities and established trading centres in various parts of India. Over time, these centres developed into powerful trading establishments and fortified settlements. The following sections examine the territorial expansion of the East India Company during its phase as a trading organisation.

1.2.1.1 Madras under the EIC

Sir Francis Day, an official of the English East India Company, obtained a three-mile-long strip of land through a grant from Damarla Venkatadri Nayaka, the Nayaka of Wandiwash, on 22 August 1639. This wetland formed part of a fishing village known as Madraspatnam. The Company constructed a factory and a warehouse to support its trading activities, and soon thereafter erected Fort St George. The fort and the surrounding areas acquired by the Company came to be known as the Fort St George settlement.

The land grant was renewed in 1642 and again in 1645, through which the Company became the owner of the village and began exercising administrative authority over the area. The settlement briefly came under French control between 1746 and 1748, but

the Company soon recaptured the fort and extended its jurisdiction to neighbouring villages. Madras was later designated as one of the three Presidencies of the East India Company in India under Pitt's India Act of 1784, and a Governor was appointed to administer the region.

1.2.1.2 Bombay under the EIC

When the British arrived in India, Bombay Island was under Portuguese control. Through a marriage treaty, King Charles II of England acquired Bombay on 11 May 1661 as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza, the Portuguese princess. Subsequently, the island was leased to the East India Company in perpetuity under a Royal Charter dated 27 March 1668. Bombay thereafter became the administrative centre for Company trade settlements along the western coast of India. Under Pitt's India Act of 1784, Bombay was recognised as one of the three Presidencies under the direct administration of the East India Company.

1.2.1.3 Bengal under the EIC

The Bengal Presidency originated from early trading posts established at Hugli during the reign of Emperor Jahangir in 1612. In 1651, the Company set up a factory on the banks of the River Hugli and encouraged merchants to settle in its vicinity. By 1696, the Hugli trading centre had developed into a fortified settlement with the construction of Fort William. The Company also secured a royal *farman* from the Mughal court granting duty-free trade through the Bay of Bengal.

Fort William soon emerged as a strategic centre in north-eastern India. The Company subsequently acquired three villages—Sutanuti, Gobindapur, and Kalikata—from local landlords and developed them into the city of Calcutta, which later became the capital of British India.



1.2.2 From Trade to Battle

With the expansion of capitalist colonial interests, competition among European trading companies increasingly resulted in direct conflicts and wars. This, in turn, led to the gradual elimination of rival European powers from the Indian political scene. At the same time, the leaders of the English East India Company came to realise that acquiring political control over territory was essential for protecting and expanding their commercial interests. The following section examines the early conflicts and military efforts of the East India Company.

During the eighteenth century, following the death of Aurangzeb, the Nawabs of Bengal consolidated their power and exercised considerable autonomy in the region. Soon, conflicts emerged between the Nawabs and the East India Company. Alivardi Khan and Siraj-ud-daula were strong rulers of Bengal, and during their reigns, tensions between the Company and the Nawabs intensified. They refused to grant the Company additional concessions enjoyed under previous rulers and imposed restrictions on the misuse of the royal *farman*. The Company's right to duty-free trade was questioned and curtailed. Matters reached a critical stage during Siraj-ud-daula's reign when the Company expanded the fortifications of Fort William without his permission. These developments culminated in open confrontation, eventually leading to the Battle of Plassey.

1.2.2.1 The Carnatic Wars

As discussed earlier, European companies initially came to India for trade but soon entered into intense rivalry, leading to direct military confrontations. Alongside commercial competition, emerging political ambitions also contributed to these conflicts. The English and French East India Companies became deeply involved in Indian politics, reflecting the long-standing rivalry

between England and France in Europe. Their competition resulted in three Carnatic Wars, which ultimately determined the fate of both powers in India.

The First Carnatic War (1746–1748) was an extension of the War of Austrian Succession in Europe. It began with British attacks on French shipping and escalated when the French captured Madras. The English sought the support of the Nawab of Carnatic but were decisively defeated by the French. The war ended with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, after which Madras was restored to the English.

The Second Carnatic War followed the death of Nizam-ul-Mulk, which led to a succession dispute. Rival claimants were supported by the French and the English respectively. Initially, the French achieved considerable success and placed their candidates on the thrones. However, the tide turned when Robert Clive captured Arcot in 1751, paving the way for English victories. Muhammad Ali was established as the Nawab of Carnatic, and French efforts to reverse the situation failed. The recall of Dupleix marked a turning point, and the war ended with the Treaty of Pondicherry.

The Third Carnatic War (1756–1763) coincided with the Seven Years' War in Europe. The conflict spread across southern India. The French suffered defeats at Chandernagore (1757), Wandiwash (1760), and Pondicherry (1761). The war concluded with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, under which French settlements were restored, but their political ambitions in India were effectively destroyed. British success in the Carnatic Wars established their supremacy in India.

1.2.2.2 Battles of Plassey and Buxar

A few months before the Battle of Plassey, when the Company refused to halt military preparations against the French during the

Seven Years' War (1756–1763), Siraj-ud-daula attacked and captured the Company's stronghold at Fort William. Shortly after its fall, a rumour spread that a number of English prisoners had died while in confinement. Colonial accounts later described this episode as the '*Black Hole Tragedy*', which subsequently served as a justification for the Company's retaliation and territorial conquest.

By February 1757, the Company had recaptured Fort William. In the following month, Robert Clive attacked and seized the French settlement at Chandernagore. Realising that Sirajuddaulah was negotiating with the French, the Company decided to engineer a change of regime to secure its political and financial interests. A conspiracy was formed involving the Jagat Seths, Robert Clive, and Mir Jafar, the Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal army. Mir Jafar was promised the position of Nawab in return for his support against Sirajuddaulah.

On 23 June 1757, the forces of the Nawab and the East India Company met in open battle at Plassey. The Bengal army consisted of about 50,000 soldiers, including nearly 16,000 cavalry, whereas the Company's forces numbered around 3,000, comprising approximately 2,100 Indian sepoys and 800 European troops. The Nawab was defeated largely due to the betrayal of Mir Jafar. Along with Sirajuddaulah, the French also lost their position in Bengal as they were allied with the Nawab. Robert Clive emerged victorious, and Mir Jafar was installed as the new Nawab of Bengal.

The most significant outcome of the Battle of Plassey was the political ascendancy of the East India Company. It is widely regarded as the foundation stone of British rule in India, as the Company gained control over Bengal's trade and commerce through its influence over Mir Jafar. The misuse of *farman* and *dastak*, along with the Company's

expansionist commercial ambitions, led to further conflict in Bengal. After Sirajuddaulah was defeated and assassinated, Mir Jafar was installed as Nawab, but his inability to satisfy the Company's demands led to his replacement by Mir Qasim. However, this political change also failed to advance the Company's interests. Mir Qasim attempted to assert his authority by withdrawing the trade privileges enjoyed by the Company. When he realised that the Company was conspiring to remove him, he formed a secret alliance with the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II and the Nawab of Awadh to expel the Company from Bengal.

The decisive confrontation was the Battle of Buxar, fought on 22 October 1764 between the Company and the combined forces of Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Awadh, and the Mughal Emperor. The allied Indian forces were defeated. In 1765, the Treaty of Allahabad was signed, through which the Company obtained the *Diwani* of Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, granting it the right to collect revenue in these regions. The Mughal Emperor and the Nawab of Awadh became pensioners of the Company.

The Company administered revenue through an arrangement known as the *Dual Government*. Revenue extracted from Bengal financed the Company's military expenses, the purchase of Indian raw materials, and the construction of administrative buildings in Calcutta. By 1765, the British had become the virtual rulers of Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha.

1.2.2.3 The Conquest of Mysore

Mysore emerged as a powerful state under Hyder Ali, who consolidated his authority in 1761 and expanded his dominions in south-western India with French assistance. He sought to expel the English East India Company by unifying southern India under his control. His expansionist policies



alarmed neighbouring states, which aligned themselves with the Company.

The British fought four wars with Mysore to establish their dominance in the region. In 1766, a tripartite alliance was formed between the British, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the Marathas against Hyder Ali. Hostilities began in 1767 and continued until 1769. However, the withdrawal of the Marathas and the Nizam forced the British to confront Hyder Ali alone. His advance towards Madras compelled the British to sign the Treaty of Madras, bringing temporary peace.

Mutual distrust led to the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780–1784). Hyder Ali accused the Company of violating the terms of the defensive alliance during the Maratha invasion of Mysore in 1771. The war began in July 1780 when Hyder Ali invaded the Carnatic and defeated British forces under Colonel Baillie at Arcot. Although Hyder Ali was later defeated at Porto Novo in 1781, he died in 1782. His son, Tipu Sultan, continued the struggle and eventually concluded peace with the Company through the Treaty of Mangalore in 1784.



Fig.1.2.1 Map of South India on the eve of the Anglo-Mysore wars

As part of his expansionist policy in the Deep South, Tipu Sultan attacked Travancore in 1790, leading to the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790–1792). The English sided with Travancore and opposed Tipu Sultan. The war proved unfavourable for Tipu, and the English army, led by Lord Cornwallis, marched towards Seringapatam in 1792. Eventually,

Tipu Sultan was compelled to sign the Treaty of Seringapatam in March 1792. According to this treaty, Mysore had to surrender nearly half of its territory to the British and their allies and also pay a war indemnity of more than three crore rupees.

After the Treaty of Seringapatam, Tipu Sultan sought assistance from the French. However, the English demanded that Tipu abandon his alliance with the French, whom they regarded as a serious threat to the East India Company. Mysore was subsequently attacked from all four sides. In May 1799, British troops stormed Seringapatam. Tipu Sultan was killed in the battle, and his army was completely defeated. The victory in the Anglo-Mysore Wars established the East India Company as the political master of South India. Through direct and indirect control, the Company came to dominate the political affairs of the entire region.

1.2.2.4 The Maratha Wars

After the conclusion of the war and the installation of a puppet government in Mysore, the East India Company turned its attention towards north-western India. This shift resulted in a series of conflicts between the Company and the Maratha Confederacy.

The undue interference of the East India Company in the internal affairs of the Marathas made the First Anglo-Maratha War (1775–1782) inevitable. Although the Company suffered a defeat in January 1779, it continued its military engagements until the signing of the Treaty of Salbai in May 1782.

The Second Anglo-Maratha War (1802–1805) was triggered by the defeat of Peshwa Baji Rao II at the hands of the Holkars, one of the prominent Maratha clans. The Peshwa sought British protection through the Treaty of Bassein in December 1802. This agreement was strongly opposed by the Sindhia and

Bhonsle families, but they were defeated at Laswari and Delhi by Lord Lake, and at Assaye and Argaon by Sir Arthur Wellesley. The Holkars later joined the conflict but were also subdued. As a result, the Marathas lost effective control over large parts of central India and Rajasthan.

The final phase of the Anglo-Maratha struggle (1817–1818) began after Lord Hastings assumed office as Governor-General in 1813. The conflict arose during British operations against the Pindari bands, which involved the invasion of Maratha territories. The Peshwa was defeated and forced to sign the Treaty of Poona in 1817, by which he relinquished his position as the head of the Maratha Confederacy. A British Resident was appointed at the capital, and the state was required to conduct its external relations through the British. The Peshwa also ceded territories including Konkan, Malwa, and Bundelkhand.

A final but unsuccessful attempt by the Marathas to resist British authority took place in 1818. With this defeat, organised Maratha opposition to British rule came to an end. The Peshwa was reduced to a pensioner of the Company, receiving an annual pension of eight lakh rupees, and surrendered his authority to the British. The Maratha territories were annexed to the British dominions, completing the Company's political supremacy over India.

1.2.2.5 Anglo-Sikh Wars

The expansionist ambitions of the British in north-western India led to another major conflict, this time with the Sikh power. Two wars were fought between the East India Company and the Sikhs. The First Anglo-Sikh War took place between 1845 and 1846. It was caused by mutual suspicion between the British and the Sikhs, as well as unrest within the Sikh army. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, effective control of



the administration passed into the hands of military committees known as *panchs*, as the ruler was a minor and the regent proved ineffective. Tensions were further aggravated by the movement of British troops during the Anglo-Afghan War of 1838. Anticipating a British attack, the Sikh army advanced towards Delhi but was defeated in a series of battles at Mudki, Ferozpur, Aliwal, and Sobraon.

The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Lahore on 9 March 1846. As a result of this treaty, the Sikhs lost a significant portion of their territory, and their army was reduced to 20,000 infantry and 12,000

cavalry. A British Resident, Sir Henry Lawrence, was stationed in Lahore, along with British troops.

The Second Anglo-Sikh War began in April 1848 with a local revolt at Multan led by the governor, Mulraj. This uprising soon took on the character of a national revolt when the Sikh army joined the rebels in September 1848. After indecisive battles at Ramnagar (22 November 1848) and Chillianwala (13 January 1849), the British achieved a decisive victory at Gujrat on 21 February 1849. The Sikh army surrendered on 12 March 1849, and Punjab was formally annexed to British India.

Recap

- ◆ The EIC began as a profit-driven trading corporation.
- ◆ The Royal Charter of 1600 legitimised English overseas trade.
- ◆ Trading factories gradually evolved into fortified political centres.
- ◆ European commercial rivalry intensified militarisation in India.
- ◆ Bengal became the earliest base of British political power.
- ◆ The Carnatic Wars decided Anglo-French rivalry in South India.
- ◆ The Battle of Plassey marked the Company's political ascendancy.
- ◆ The Battle of Buxar secured the Company's revenue and sovereignty.
- ◆ Mysore resisted British expansion under Hyder and Tipu.
- ◆ The Maratha defeat ended indigenous confederate resistance.
- ◆ The Anglo-Sikh Wars completed British conquest of north-west India.

Objective Questions

1. Where was the headquarters of the English East India Company in India?
2. What was the 'Waterloo' of the French East India Company in India?

3. When was the Sreerangapattanam Peace Treaty signed?
4. In which year did the Battle of Plassey take place?
5. Who was the first English Governor of Bengal?
6. What was the peace treaty of the First Carnatic War?
7. What was the peace treaty of the First Anglo-Sikh War?
8. In which year was the Treaty of Salbai concluded?
9. Who defeated Tipu Sultan in 1799?
10. Which Act of the British Parliament recognised the Madras and Bombay provinces?

Answers

1. Fort William, Calcutta
2. Battle of Wandiwash
3. 1792
4. 1757
5. Robert Clive
6. Aix-la-Chapelle
7. Treaty of Lahore
8. First Anglo-Maratha War (17 May 1782)
9. Lord Wellesley
10. The Pitt's India Act, 1784

Assignments

1. Examine how the English East India Company transformed from a trading enterprise into a territorial power in India.
2. Analyse the significance of the Battles of Plassey and Buxar in establishing British political dominance in India.



3. Discuss the role of regional Indian powers in resisting British expansion during the eighteenth century.
4. Critically assess the impact of the Anglo-Mysore, Anglo-Maratha, and Anglo-Sikh Wars on the consolidation of British rule.

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UNIT

The Subsidiary Alliance and the Doctrine of Lapse

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse and assess the political consequences of the Subsidiary System and the Doctrine of Lapse
- ◆ compare the nature and extent of British involvement in Indian politics during the nineteenth century
- ◆ distinguish the key features of the mercantile and finance-capitalist phases of colonialism

Prerequisite

After the first quarter of the 19th century, the colonial policies in India changed considerably. The constant conflict with other European companies forced the English to form and maintain standing armies in India. However, after the initial wars, the Company altered its policy of conquest. This change was due in part to parliamentary interventions from Britain and in part to the increasing expenditure and declining profits of the Company. Consequently, they established a policy of sharing the army and the expenses with the Native States. Through this policy, they conquered the Native States without direct confrontation. Let's have a detailed discussion of these policies in this unit.

Keywords

Regulating Act, Pitt's India Act, Subsidiary Alliance, Doctrine of Lapse, Governor-General, Princely States, British Paramountcy



Discussion

1.3.1 Parliamentary Interventions from Britain

The mismanagement and personal business interests of Company officials, which resulted in a chaotic situation in Bengal, compelled the British Parliament to investigate the affairs of the East India Company. The preliminary investigation revealed gross malpractices even among senior officials of the Company. Moreover, the Company was facing a serious financial crisis at this time and had approached the British government for monetary assistance. Taking advantage of this situation, the British Parliament passed the Regulating Act of 1773 to regulate the activities of the Company in India. This marked the first direct interference of the British Parliament in Indian affairs.

Provisions of the Regulating Act, 1773

- ◆ A Supreme Court of Judicature was established at Calcutta, with Sir Elijah Impey as the first Chief Justice. The court had civil and criminal jurisdiction over British subjects, but not over Indian natives.
 - ◆ However, the Regulating Act failed to effectively regulate the affairs of the Company in India. It did not curb corruption among Company officials. Moreover, parliamentary control over the Company proved ineffective, as there was no proper mechanism to scrutinise the reports sent by the Governor-General in Council.
 - ◆ To rectify the defects of the Regulating Act and to further reform the Company's administration, another Act was passed in 1784, known as Pitt's India Act, named after William Pitt, the British Prime Minister at the time. This Act introduced a system of dual control over British territories in India, shared between the British Parliament and the Company, with ultimate authority resting with the British government.
 - ◆ Under this Act, a Board of Control was established in addition to the Court of Directors. While the Company was represented by the Court of Directors, the British government exercised control through the Board of Control. Calcutta was recognised as the capital of British India, and the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay were subordinated to the Bengal Presidency. Thus, Pitt's India Act gave a more definite shape to British rule in India.
 - ◆ The Charter Act of 1813 was the next significant step towards the consolidation of British power in India, even though it ended the Company's monopoly over Indian trade. This Act regulated the Company's territorial revenues and commercial profits.
- ◆ The Act created the post of Governor-General, along with four Councillors, in the Presidency of Fort William (Calcutta). Together, they were known as the Governor-General in Council.
 - ◆ Warren Hastings was appointed as the first Governor-General of the Presidency of Fort William.
 - ◆ The Governors and Executive Councils of Madras and Bombay were brought under the control of the Governor-General of Bengal.
 - ◆ The Company's Directors were elected for a period of five years, with one-fourth of them to retire each year. They were not eligible for re-election.

and authorised the local governments in India to impose taxes and punish defaulters.

The Charter Act of 1833 legalised British colonisation of India. It transformed the East India Company from a commercial body into a purely administrative agency. The Act declared that the Indian territories possessed by the Company were held “in trust for His Majesty, his heirs and successors.” It centralised the administration of India by designating the Governor-General of Bengal as the Governor-General of India, vesting him with all civil and military powers. Lord William Bentinck became the first Governor-General of India. The Act also recognised the Governor-General’s Council as the Indian Council.

The Charter Act of 1853 laid the foundation of the modern parliamentary form of government in India. For the first time, the legislative wing of the Governor-General’s Council functioned as a law-making body on the model of the British Parliament. It introduced an open competitive system for the recruitment of civil servants in India. To implement this, the Macaulay Committee (Committee on the Indian Civil Service) was appointed in 1854. The Act also separated, for the first time, the legislative and executive functions of the Governor-General’s Council.

Thus, through parliamentary interventions between 1773 and 1853, the East India Company was transformed into a legal administrative unit of the British Government in India. The regulations framed by the Governor-General’s Council acquired the force of law and became the law of the land.

1.3.2 The Conquest Policies of the East India Company

A major shift from direct military conquest to diplomatic expansion marked the policy of the East India Company during the nineteenth century. The Company

increasingly abandoned open warfare and adopted strategic political devices such as the Subsidiary Alliance and the Doctrine of Lapse. These policies proved to be less expensive yet highly effective instruments for the annexation of Indian princely states. This phase witnessed the use of the Company’s most destructive political strategies to conquer the interior and remote regions of India.

1.3.2.1 Subsidiary Alliance

To bring Indian princely states within the orbit of British power, the East India Company introduced the Subsidiary Alliance, a policy of indirect domination formulated by Lord Wellesley (Governor-General, 1798–1805). It was essentially a policy of non-intervention coupled with control. Under this system, Indian rulers were required to pay a subsidy to the British for the maintenance of Company troops stationed in their territories. In return, the British offered protection against external and internal threats.

The Nawab of Awadh was among the early Indian rulers to enter into a subsidiary alliance with the Company after the Battle of Buxar, while the Nizam of Hyderabad was the first ruler to accept the fully developed form of the system.

Features of the Subsidiary Alliance

- ◆ Although effectively devised by Lord Wellesley, the idea of the Subsidiary Alliance had earlier been introduced by the French Governor Dupleix.
- ◆ Indian rulers entering the alliance were required to disband their own armies and accept the stationing of British troops within their territories.



- instead of monetary payment,
it permanently annexed portions
of the allied state's territory.

1.3.2.2 Advantages to the Company

The Company gradually extended its influence over almost all Indian states through this system. Allied rulers became entirely dependent on the British due to the permanent presence of British troops. Consequently, the Company emerged as the de facto ruler, while Indian rulers were reduced to subordinate status.

The financial burden of maintaining British troops fell on Indian states, forcing many rulers to surrender large portions of their territories. This enabled the Company to acquire vast territories with minimal military effort.

1.3.3 The Native States under Subsidiary Alliance

The Nawab of Awadh was the first Indian ruler to enter into a Subsidiary Alliance with the English East India Company after the Battle of Buxar (1764). Lord Wellesley compelled the Nawab to accept the demands of the Company following his defeat. In return for British protection, the Nawab was required to maintain a fixed British army within his territory.

Evolution of the Subsidiary Alliance

1. Initially, the Company provided military assistance in return for a lump sum payment.
2. Later, a fixed and permanent British force was maintained for the ally in return for an annual subsidy, though the troops remained in Company territory.
3. Subsequently, British forces were stationed within the allied state itself.
4. In its final form, the Company provided full protection, but



Hyderabad

The Carnatic Wars led to the Nizam of Hyderabad becoming an ally of the British through the signing of the Subsidiary Alliance in 1798. To eliminate French influence, the British insisted that the Nizam sever all ties with the French. The Company also prohibited Hyderabad from forming alliances with the Marathas thereafter.

Mysore

In 1799, after the death of Tipu Sultan, the new rulers of Mysore were compelled to sign a Subsidiary Alliance with the British. They were forbidden from negotiating treaties or forming alliances with neighbouring states.

Maratha States

After the end of the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1819), the Maratha ruler Baji Rao II accepted a Subsidiary Alliance with the East India Company. Even earlier, several Maratha chiefs had entered into alliances with the Company: Scindia (1804), Gaekwad (1805), Bhonsle (1806), and Holkar (1818).

Travancore Kingdom

The East India Company established a Subsidiary Alliance with the Kingdom of Travancore in 1795. As a result, when Tipu Sultan attacked Travancore, the Company provided military assistance, which eventually led to the final war between Tipu Sultan and the Company.

1.3.3.1 Doctrine of Lapse

Following the success of the Subsidiary Alliance system, the territorial expansion ambitions of the East India Company led to the formulation of another strategic yet controversial policy known as the Doctrine of Lapse. This annexation policy was introduced by Lord Dalhousie during his tenure as Governor-General (1848–1856). It became

a powerful administrative instrument for the expansion of British paramountcy and was closely linked to issues of hereditary succession among Indian rulers.

According to the hereditary laws prevailing in India, a ruler without a natural heir could legally adopt a son, who would then enjoy all the personal and political rights of a natural heir. However, under Company rule, due to the political subordination of Indian states, rulers gradually began seeking British permission for adoption. The British challenged this practice, arguing that an adopted son could inherit only personal and private property, not the sovereign right to rule. Consequently, the Company sought to abolish the practice of adoption for succession purposes.

In practice, the Doctrine of Lapse stipulated that any princely state lacking a natural male heir would be annexed to the Company's territories.

Features of the Doctrine of Lapse

- ◆ The doctrine discouraged and effectively ended the centuries-old practice of adoption for political succession in India.
- ◆ Any princely state under the direct or indirect control of the East India Company was required to produce a natural heir; failing this, it would be annexed.
- ◆ An adopted son could inherit only the personal property of the ruler, not the kingdom.
- ◆ The East India Company legitimised the annexation of states lacking natural heirs through this policy.



Effects of the Policy

- ◆ Many Indian states lost their sovereignty and were annexed into the Company's empire.
- ◆ The policy generated widespread resentment among Indian rulers.
- ◆ The subjects of annexed states were deeply dissatisfied with the perceived illegality of the doctrine.
- ◆ The Doctrine of Lapse became one of the significant administrative causes of the Revolt of 1857.

1.3.4 Fate of Princely States

The Doctrine of Lapse declared that if an Indian ruler died without a male heir, his kingdom would “lapse” and become part of Company territory. Several native states were annexed under this doctrine, including Satara (1848), Sambalpur (1850), Udaipur (1852), Nagpur (1853), and Jhansi (1854).

Satara

Satara was the first state annexed under the Doctrine of Lapse in 1849. It was a princely state established after the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1818). The state was ruled by the Bhonsle dynasty, and its first ruler was Pratap Singh, who was deposed in 1838. His brother Shahaji succeeded him

but died in 1848 without a natural heir. The Company refused to recognise his adopted son, and Satara was annexed.

Sambalpur

Sambalpur was annexed next under the Doctrine of Lapse. The state had been founded in the mid-fifteenth century by Balarama Deva. It was occupied by the Marathas in 1808 but was restored to Jayanta Singh by the Company in 1817 after the Third Anglo-Maratha War. When the ruler died without a direct male heir in 1849, the British annexed the state.

Udaipur, Nagpur, and Jhansi

Udaipur, Nagpur, and Jhansi met a similar fate. In Jhansi, Raja Gangadhar Rao died in 1853, leaving behind an adopted heir. The Company refused to recognise the adoption, and Lord Dalhousie declared the annexation of Jhansi in 1854, asserting the paramount power's right to resume control.

Annexation of Awadh

Finally, Awadh (Oudh) was annexed on 7 February 1856, not strictly under the Doctrine of Lapse but on the grounds of alleged misrule. Soon after, the son of the deposed Nawab joined the revolt of 1857. Thus, the annexation of Awadh, along with the Doctrine of Lapse, became a major cause of the uprising.

Recap

- ◆ Parliament began controlling Company administration in India
- ◆ The Regulating Act established the Governor-General and Supreme Court
- ◆ Pitt's Act introduced a dual control system
- ◆ Charter Acts centralised and strengthened British governance
- ◆ The Subsidiary Alliance reduced Indian rulers' independence
- ◆ British Residents supervised princely state administrations
- ◆ Indian states became financially dependent on Company
- ◆ The Doctrine of Lapse enabled territorial annexations
- ◆ Annexations caused resentment among Indian rulers
- ◆ British policies contributed to the Revolt of 1857

Objective Questions

1. When was the Regulating Act passed?
2. In which year was Pitt's India Act introduced ?
3. Which Act ended the trade monopoly of the East India Company in India?
4. Who introduced the Subsidiary Alliance system in India?
5. Who introduced the Doctrine of Lapse?
6. Which was the first state annexed under the Doctrine of Lapse?
7. How did the Nawab of Oudh respond to the Company's policies?
8. When did Travancore sign the Subsidiary Alliance?

9. In which year did Mysore enter into a Subsidiary Alliance with the Company?
10. When was Oudh annexed by the Company?

Answers

1. 1773
2. 1784
3. Charter Act of 1813
4. Lord Wellesley
5. Lord Dalhousie
6. Satara
7. Accepted the Subsidiary Alliance
8. 1795
9. 1799
10. 7 February 1856

Assignments

1. Examine the significance of the Regulating Act of 1773 and Pitt's India Act of 1784 in strengthening British control in India.
2. Analyse the objectives and impact of the Subsidiary Alliance system on Indian princely states.
3. Critically evaluate the Doctrine of Lapse and its role in the expansion of British rule in India.
4. Discuss how British administrative policies transformed political authority in India during the nineteenth century.

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UNIT

Economic Policies – Permanent and Ryotwari Settlements

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the nature and mechanisms of colonial exploitation
- ◆ analyse the economic impact of colonialism on India
- ◆ compare the effects of colonialism across different sectors of the Indian economy
- ◆ develop critical perspectives on nationalist interpretations of colonialism

Prerequisite

This unit examines the nature of colonial rule in India, its functioning, and its economic impact, as analysed by scholars such as Dadabhai Naoroji, R. C. Dutt, and M. G. Ranade. These thinkers strongly criticised British economic policies and highlighted the concept of the “drain of wealth,” through which India’s resources were systematically transferred to Britain. According to them, land revenue was one of the major sources of colonial exploitation.

During the early phase of British rule, existing revenue systems were largely continued, but later, several experiments were introduced to maximise income. After establishing political control in India, the British East India Company implemented different land revenue systems in various regions. This unit focuses on three major systems introduced during the colonial period - the Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari systems - and examines their features, objectives, and impact on Indian society and agriculture.

Keywords

Permanent Settlement, Zamindari System, Ryotwari System, Mahalwari System, Land revenue, Commercialisation of land, Peasant exploitation, Resistance

Discussion

1.4.1 The Permanent Settlement (Zamindari System)

The term *zamindar* is derived from the Persian words *zamin* (land) and *dar* (holder), meaning one who possesses land. During the Mughal period, the term was used broadly to describe different categories of landholders, ranging from powerful local chiefs to small village proprietors. Many zamindars were descendants of former ruling families who retained control over portions of their ancestral lands.

Before British rule, zamindars functioned mainly as intermediaries between the state and cultivators. Their primary responsibility was to supervise agriculture and collect land revenue. These rights were generally hereditary. They collected revenue directly from peasants but were not considered absolute owners of the land. As long as cultivators paid revenue, they could not be evicted. Tax rates depended on the quality of the land and the type of crop. Zamindars also exercised limited judicial and military powers and maintained troops in support of the ruler.

1.4.1.1 Permanent Settlement under British Rule

After acquiring political control over Bengal, the East India Company sought to maximise revenue from agriculture. Initially, British officials lacked knowledge of existing revenue practices and failed to

secure stable income. Lord Cornwallis, after detailed enquiries, reintroduced the zamindari system and made it permanent in 1793. This arrangement came to be known as the Permanent Settlement. The system was first implemented in Bengal and Bihar and later extended to parts of Madras and Varanasi. It gradually spread across northern India through successive regulations.

Under this system, an agreement was made between the Company and the zamindars for the assessment and collection of land revenue. Zamindars were recognised as owners of the land and leased it to tenant cultivators. They were required to pay a fixed amount - about 89 per cent of revenue - to the Company and were allowed to retain the remaining share.

Revenue collection became the responsibility of zamindars, while Company officials inspected land and crops periodically. Zamindars could control multiple estates, and their rights became hereditary. They were also permitted to sell or transfer land. In return, the Company secured a regular and fixed income without maintaining a large administrative machinery.

1.4.1.2 Problems and Limitations

During the early nineteenth century, cultivation expanded, and zamindars' incomes increased. However, since revenue was permanently fixed, the Company could not benefit from this growth. At the same time, the revenue demand was set very



high. Many zamindars failed to meet their obligations and lost their estates.

Most zamindars showed little interest in improving agricultural productivity. They functioned mainly as rent collectors. Cultivators faced severe exploitation, paid high rents, and enjoyed little security. Many were forced to borrow from moneylenders to meet tax demands. Failure to repay often resulted in eviction. In many cases, zamindars appointed intermediaries who extracted excessive rents. This added another layer of exploitation. The system discouraged investment in agriculture and contributed to rural stagnation.

The zamindars gradually became mere tax agents rather than promoters of cultivation. Peasants lost control over land and production. High taxes led to land sales and migration. Neither the Company nor the zamindars made serious efforts to improve farming conditions.

Revenue had to be paid in cash and immediately after harvest. No relief was provided during droughts or floods. Failure to pay resulted in eviction. These practices deepened agrarian distress.

Although the system initially benefited the Company by ensuring stable revenue, it later became ineffective. Peasant suffering and insecurity eventually contributed to rural unrest and resistance movements in Bengal.

1.4.2 The Ryotwari System

When the Company extended its control over southern India, it realised that conditions there differed from those in Bengal. The absence of strong hereditary zamindars made the Permanent Settlement unsuitable. As a result, a new system of revenue collection was introduced.

The *Ryotwari* system was developed by Captain Alexander Read and Sir Thomas Munro in the late eighteenth century. It was implemented widely during Munro's tenure as Governor of Madras (1819–26). Under this system, revenue was collected directly from individual cultivators, known as *ryots*. It was introduced mainly in Tamil Nadu and later extended to parts of Maharashtra, Punjab, Assam, Coorg, and other regions.

1.4.2.1 Features of the Ryotwari System

This system recognised the individual cultivator as the primary holder of land. Agreements were made directly between the Company and farmers. *Ryots* were given rights to sell, lease, or transfer land. Unlike the *zamindari* system, no intermediaries existed.

The Company retained the power to revise tax rates periodically. As long as revenue was paid, farmers could not be evicted. In theory, the system was intended to benefit both cultivators and the government. In practice, the system placed enormous power in the hands of subordinate revenue officials. Supervision was weak, which encouraged corruption. Tax rates were high, often reaching 50 per cent on dry land and 60 per cent on wet land.

No serious efforts were made to improve productivity. Relief during crop failure was rarely granted. Since taxes had to be paid in cash, cultivators depended heavily on moneylenders. Loans were taken at high interest rates, and default often resulted in loss of land. Although intermediaries were removed, economic dependence on moneylenders created a new form of exploitation.

1.4.3 The Mahalwari System

By the early nineteenth century, Company officials felt the need for another revenue arrangement. Continuous wars and territorial expansion required large financial resources. Fixed revenue systems no longer met these demands. In 1822, Holt Mackenzie introduced the *Mahalwari* system in north-western India. The term *mahal* referred to a village or group of villages. Under this system, revenue responsibility was shared by the entire village community and its headmen. The system was implemented in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Central India, and the North-Western Provinces.

1.4.3.1 Features of the Mahalwari System

The *Mahal* was the basic unit of assessment. Ownership remained with cultivators, but revenue was fixed collectively. Each farmer contributed according to their holding. Average rents were calculated based on soil quality. Settlements were usually made for thirty years. Village headmen were responsible for collection and payment. Over time, they acquired powers similar to zamindars, which is why the system is often described as a “modified zamindari system.” Assessment methods were often unrealistic and based on faulty assumptions. This created scope for manipulation and corruption. Headmen frequently exploited peasants. Collection costs increased, sometimes exceeding revenue. High tax rates discouraged cultivation. Many peasants abandoned their lands, leading to deserted villages. The expectation that farmers would become prosperous entrepreneurs remained unfulfilled.

1.4.4 Consequences of Land Revenue Systems

Before British rule, land was generally not treated as private property. Revenue demands were moderate, and customary rights were respected. British interventions transformed land into a marketable commodity. Taxes increased sharply and had to be paid in cash. This led to widespread indebtedness. Moneylenders gradually became major landowners. Frequent crop failures, heavy taxation, and evictions impoverished large sections of the peasantry. Between the 1760s and 1857, these pressures resulted in numerous peasant and tribal uprisings across India.

1.4.4.1 Peasant and Tribal Resistance

In Bengal, economic distress and famine contributed to the Sanyasi-Fakir Rebellion (1770–1800). Displaced peasants joined religious groups and attacked granaries and treasuries to support the poor. The movement spread across several districts and took decades to suppress.

In 1783, peasants in Rangpur and Dinajpur revolted against oppressive tax collection, particularly under the contractor Debi Singh. They established temporary self-rule and resisted Company authority. In South India, the Poligar Rebellion reflected resistance by dispossessed local chiefs. Leaders like Veerapandya Kattabomman opposed the *Ryotwari* system, which reduced their traditional powers. The Mappila uprisings in Malabar (1836–1920) emerged from grievances over land rights, excessive taxation, and eviction. Similarly, tribal groups such as the Bhils, Kols, Santhals, Kurichyas, and Kurumbas resisted colonial intrusion into

their territories. Moneylenders, landlords, and officials exploited tribal communities, leading to armed resistance. These revolts were eventually suppressed by military

force. Contemporary accounts, such as the *Calcutta Review* (1856), described widespread extortion, violence, and economic injustice faced by tribal populations.

Recap

- ◆ British land revenue systems aimed at maximising colonial profits.
- ◆ Permanent Settlement strengthened zamindars and weakened cultivators' rights.
- ◆ The *zamindari* system encouraged rent-seeking and agricultural stagnation.
- ◆ The *Ryotwari* system linked farmers directly with Company administration.
- ◆ High *Ryotwari* taxes increased farmers' dependence on moneylenders.
- ◆ The *Mahalwari* system promoted village responsibility but empowered local elites.
- ◆ Revenue demands remained high despite frequent crop failures.
- ◆ Colonial policies converted land into private marketable property.
- ◆ Indebtedness and eviction caused widespread rural impoverishment.
- ◆ Agrarian distress sparked major peasant and tribal uprisings.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Permanent Settlement introduced?
2. Who introduced the Permanent Settlement in Bengal?
3. Which land revenue system was introduced by the Company in South India?
4. Who introduced the Ryotwari system in South India?
5. Which land revenue system was implemented in Punjab and North-Western India?

6. The Santhal Rebellion was a resistance against which land revenue system?
7. Which land revenue system is referred to as the “Modified Zamindari System”?
8. The Poligar Rebellion was a consequence of which land revenue system?
9. Under which land revenue system was tax collection entrusted to the village headman?
10. Zamindars became hereditary landowners under which land revenue system?

Answers

1. 1793
2. Lord Cornwallis
3. Ryotwari System
4. Col. Macaulay
5. Mahalwari System
6. Zamindari System
7. Mahalwari System
8. Ryotwari System
9. Mahalwari System
10. Permanent Settlement

Assignments

1. Examine the objectives, features, and impact of the Permanent Settlement on Indian agriculture and rural society.
2. Compare the Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari systems with reference to their methods of revenue collection and effects on peasants.
3. Analyse how British land revenue policies contributed to peasant and tribal uprisings in colonial India

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UNIT

Debate on Deindustrialization

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the nature and mechanisms of colonial exploitation
- ◆ analyse the economic impact of colonialism on India
- ◆ compare the effects of colonialism across different sectors of the Indian economy
- ◆ develop critical perspectives on nationalist interpretations of colonialism

Prerequisite

This unit examines the nature and impact of colonialism and capitalism in India, with special reference to their effects on indigenous industries, agriculture, trade, and society. To understand this process, learners must first be familiar with the basic concepts of capitalism and colonialism, the structure of traditional Indian industries, patterns of trade and trade relations, the distinction between commercial and edible crops, and the long-term consequences of economic exploitation.

Colonial rule was experienced by ordinary Indians through widespread poverty, malnutrition, disease, cultural disruption, and political and economic marginalisation. It also involved systematic efforts by colonial authorities to create feelings of social and racial inferiority among the colonised population. These processes had deep socio-religious as well as politico-economic consequences.

The impact of colonialism was first felt strongly in the Indian handloom industry, which suffered a severe decline under British policies. Gradually, this economic disruption extended to other sectors. The commercialisation of agriculture and the deindustrialisation of traditional industries emerged as two major outcomes of colonial rule, reshaping India's economy in favour of British interests.



Although colonial rule is sometimes portrayed as having brought ‘modernisation’ and social reform, a closer examination reveals that such changes were largely incidental. They occurred alongside, and often at the cost of, severe economic impoverishment and the systematic exploitation of Indian resources and labour. This unit therefore seeks to critically analyse colonialism not merely as a political system but as an economic and social structure that profoundly transformed Indian society.

Keywords

Commercialisation, Deindustrialisation, Drain of Wealth, Cash Crops, Colonial Economy, Capital Formation, Imperialism

Discussion

1.5.1 Commercialisation of Agriculture

The land revenue policies introduced by the East India Company increased its financial gains but had serious adverse effects on the Indian agrarian system. Frequent eviction of peasants, high revenue demands, and insecurity of tenure reduced food grain production in many regions. At the same time, colonial authorities and European capitalists encouraged the cultivation of commercial crops that served as raw materials for British industries. As a result, while food crop production declined, the output of cash crops increased significantly.

The term *commercialisation of agriculture* refers to the gradual shift from subsistence farming to the production of crops meant primarily for sale in domestic and international markets. Under this system, agricultural activities were governed by profit considerations rather than by the needs of local consumption. This process was closely linked to the expansion of industrial capitalism and colonial rule.

An important stimulus to this shift occurred during the American Civil War

(1861–65), when the supply of cotton from the United States to Britain was disrupted. Britain increasingly turned to India to meet its industrial requirements. From the 1860s onwards, cotton and jute became major commercial crops, gradually replacing food crops in several regions.

Commercialisation in India was introduced through a combination of direct and indirect colonial policies. New land tenure systems such as the Permanent Settlement, *Ryotwari*, and *Mahalwari* transformed land into a marketable commodity. Land could now be bought, sold, and mortgaged. Wealthy landlords and moneylenders gained control over large areas of land. Agriculture, which had previously been largely a way of life, increasingly became a commercial activity oriented towards external markets.

Large tracts of land were converted into plantations producing tea, coffee, rubber, indigo, and other cash crops. European planters played a dominant role in this process, especially in Assam, Bengal, South India, and parts of western India.

Several factors facilitated the commercialisation of Indian agriculture:

- ◆ The establishment of political stability under British rule, which promoted the growth of an integrated market.
- ◆ The spread of a money economy, which transformed agricultural produce into market commodities.
- ◆ The colonial subordination of India, reducing it to a supplier of raw materials and an importer of manufactured goods.
- ◆ The replacement of customary practices by contracts and open competition.
- ◆ The monetisation of land revenue, which forced peasants to sell crops for cash.
- ◆ The entry of British finance capital after the end of the Company's trade monopoly.
- ◆ Changes in land revenue systems and the growing influence of moneylenders.

1.5.1.1 Impact of Commercialisation of Agriculture

Commercialisation led to some increase in agricultural productivity, particularly in cash crops. However, this growth did not extend to food grains. The main beneficiaries were European planters, wealthy peasants, traders, and moneylenders. Small cultivators and tenants remained vulnerable.

Indian traders and moneylenders accumulated wealth by acting as intermediaries between peasants and colonial markets. This strengthened rural indebtedness and increased peasant dependence on credit. In many regions, cultivators were trapped in cycles of debt and land loss.

The decline in food production contributed to recurrent famines, especially during the late nineteenth century. Commercialisation also encouraged regional specialisation based on climate and soil conditions. The Deccan region focused on cotton, Bengal on jute and indigo, Bihar on opium, Assam on tea, and Punjab on wheat.

Overall, commercialisation integrated Indian agriculture into the global capitalist economy. However, this integration occurred on unequal terms and primarily served British industrial interests.

1.5.2 Deindustrialisation

India has traditionally been regarded as an agrarian society. Even today, a large section of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. However, for centuries before colonial rule, India was also a major centre of manufacturing. Indian textiles, metalwork, handicrafts, and other products were highly valued in international markets. This reputation attracted European trading companies from the seventeenth century onwards.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe and the spread of factory-based production transformed global economic relations. As India became a British colony, these changes had profound consequences for its traditional industries. The systematic decline and destruction of indigenous manufacturing under colonial rule is known as deindustrialisation.

Deindustrialisation does not merely mean the decline of handicrafts. In many parts of the world, traditional industries declined with the rise of modern factories. In India, however, this decline was not accompanied by the development of a strong indigenous industrial base. British manufactured goods flooded Indian markets, while local industries received little protection or support. As a

result, artisans and craftsmen lost their livelihoods. Many were forced to shift to agriculture or low-paid wage labour. The weakening of traditional industries also reduced the scope for capital accumulation and technological improvement within India.

1.5.2.1 India before Deindustrialisation

During the Mughal period, India was one of the largest economies in the world, contributing nearly one-fourth of global output. Contemporary foreign travellers described India as prosperous and commercially advanced. A centralised monetary system, efficient road networks, flourishing overseas trade, and organised fiscal policies supported economic growth. Indian cotton and silk textiles dominated international markets. Manufacturing and handicrafts formed a significant part of the economy. Agricultural production also expanded, particularly of food grains such as rice, wheat, and barley, along with cash crops like cotton and opium.

Stages of Deindustrialisation

In the early phase of Company rule, Indian exports declined gradually due to wars and political instability. However, the presence of other European traders initially allowed some industries to survive. After the Battle of Plassey (1757), wealth extracted from Bengal and other regions was used to finance industrial development in Britain. Indian capital indirectly contributed to the growth of British textile factories. British manufactured goods, especially cotton textiles, entered Indian markets freely. At the same time, Indian products faced heavy duties and restrictions. This unequal trade policy weakened local industries.

Colonial economic policies turned India into a captive market for British goods and a major supplier of raw materials such as

cotton, jute, and indigo. Finished Indian products gradually disappeared from export markets.

The expansion of railways and other infrastructure facilitated the large-scale movement of raw materials to ports and industrial centres. This further integrated India into the colonial economy as a supplier rather than a producer of finished goods. As traditional industries declined, agriculture shifted increasingly towards cash crop cultivation. Many artisans became landless labourers or marginal farmers. The economy experienced deflation, rising rural debt, and higher prices of essential commodities.

Evaluation of Deindustrialisation

Recent studies have provided a more nuanced understanding of deindustrialisation in India. Scholars influenced by nationalist and Marxist perspectives have emphasised the exploitative nature of colonial economic policies. At the same time, contemporary historians have highlighted regional variations and sectoral differences.

Tapan Raychaudhuri observed that the condition of artisans and weavers in eastern India began to deteriorate soon after 1757 and worsened further in the nineteenth century. Colonial interventions altered patterns of production, labour relations, and trade networks. Before colonial rule, India accounted for nearly 25 per cent of global manufacturing output. By the end of the nineteenth century, this share had fallen to around 2.4 per cent. This sharp decline reflects the long-term impact of colonial economic restructuring.

Nationalist and Marxist scholars argue that the inflow of machine-made British goods destroyed the market for Indian handicrafts. The loss of income forced craftsmen into low-paid employment. The transformation of independent producers

into wage labourers became a defining feature of deindustrialisation. Colonial officials claimed that British rule brought modernisation through railways, plantations, mining, and steel industries. They presented these developments as evidence of mutual benefit. However, critics pointed out that such industries primarily served imperial interests and did not promote balanced industrial growth.

Contemporary debates recognise that deindustrialisation did not affect all regions and sectors equally. Some areas experienced partial industrial growth, while others suffered severe decline. Nevertheless, the overall pattern shows that finished goods production weakened, while raw material and cash crop production expanded.

Colonial rule converted India into a resource-dependent economy and a captive market for British industries. Britain's industrial advancement was achieved largely at the expense of its colonies. Unlike other industrialising societies, India was denied the opportunity to develop an autonomous industrial base.

The decline of traditional industries may be a normal feature of industrialisation. In India, however, this process occurred without meaningful industrial transformation. Colonial constraints prevented the emergence of a self-sustaining industrial economy, leaving long-term structural weaknesses in the post-colonial period.

Consequences

Colonial rule severely restricted the growth of Indian entrepreneurship and indigenous enterprise. Indian merchants, manufacturers, and financiers were denied adequate opportunities to expand their businesses under colonial economic policies. The dominance of British capital and institutions limited the emergence of

an independent Indian capitalist class. The policies of the East India Company and later the British government hindered capital formation within India. Large portions of the surplus generated in agriculture, trade, and industry were transferred abroad instead of being reinvested locally. As a result, domestic savings and productive investments remained low.

One of the most damaging consequences of colonial rule was the continuous drain of wealth from India to Britain. Indian resources and revenues were used to finance Britain's industrial and infrastructural development, while India remained economically backward. The agrarian sector also suffered long-term stagnation. The forced shift from food crops to commercial crops weakened food security and reduced soil fertility in many regions. Peasants became increasingly vulnerable to market fluctuations and climatic uncertainties.

Colonial policies contributed to the decline of handicraft industries without creating a strong modern industrial base to replace them. While a few modern industries developed, they remained limited in scope and were largely controlled by British capital. Mismanagement by colonial authorities led to recurring famines in India. Priority was given to cash crop cultivation for export rather than to food production for domestic consumption. Even during periods of scarcity, food grains continued to be exported. Between the mid-nineteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century, a series of severe famines claimed millions of lives. These disasters were not merely natural but were closely linked to colonial economic policies.

1.5.4 Drain of Wealth

Nationalist historians strongly argued that widespread poverty in India was the direct outcome of colonial exploitation. They maintained that India's economic decline was



caused not by internal weaknesses but by the systematic transfer of wealth to Britain.

Dadabhai Naoroji was the foremost exponent of this view. He analysed the economic consequences of British rule and demonstrated how India's resources were continuously drained. In 1867, he presented his ideas on economic drain, which he later elaborated in his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901). His analysis is commonly known as the "Drain Theory." Drawing on his experience in both India and England, Naoroji attempted to estimate India's net economic loss under colonial rule. He argued that a substantial portion of India's annual income was transferred abroad without adequate return. He estimated this loss at nearly £200 to £300 million annually, though later scholars have debated the exact figures.

To explain the mechanism of the drain, Naoroji identified several major factors:

- ◆ First, India was governed by a foreign power. Political control rested in British hands, and economic decisions served imperial interests.
- ◆ Second, unlike settler colonies, India did not receive large-scale immigrant capital or skilled labour that could contribute to development.
- ◆ Third, the entire cost of civil

administration and the army was borne by Indian revenues.

- ◆ Fourth, India financed British imperial expansion both within and outside its borders.
- ◆ Fifth, free trade policies enabled Europeans to occupy highly paid positions that could have been held by qualified Indians.
- ◆ Finally, most high-income earners during British rule were foreigners. Their savings were remitted to Britain rather than invested in India.

Through these processes, wealth continuously flowed from India to England without corresponding economic, commercial, or material benefits.

The drain of wealth began soon after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, which reflected the Company's political control over Bengal. Major sources of the drain included excessive land revenue collections, profits from monopolistic trade, unrestricted imports of British goods, salaries and pensions of British officials, and interest on public debt held in Britain. R. C. Dutt further developed this analysis and argued that a substantial share of India's national income was transferred abroad. He emphasised that this drain weakened India's productive capacity and contributed to chronic poverty and underdevelopment.

Recap

- ◆ Colonial policies shifted agriculture towards export-oriented cash crops.
- ◆ Land revenue systems weakened food security and peasant stability.

- ◆ The American Civil War increased India's cotton production.
- ◆ Moneylenders gained control over the rural agrarian economy.
- ◆ Traditional industries declined under British trade policies.
- ◆ Indian artisans lost markets to British manufactured goods.
- ◆ Railways strengthened raw material extraction and exports.
- ◆ Colonial rule restricted indigenous industrial development.
- ◆ The drain of wealth transferred Indian surplus to Britain.
- ◆ Economic exploitation caused long-term poverty and stagnation.

Objective Questions

1. Name one major cash crop cultivated in colonial India.
2. Which war led to an increased demand for Indian cotton?
3. Which land revenue system made land a saleable commodity?
4. What is meant by deindustrialisation?
5. Which industry suffered the most under colonial rule?
6. Who propounded the 'Drain Theory'?
7. Name the famous work written by Dadabhai Naoroji on colonial exploitation.
8. Which battle marked the beginning of large-scale economic drain from India?
9. What kind of market was India reduced to under colonial rule?
10. Who exercised control over plantation agriculture in colonial India?

Answers

1. Cotton
2. American Civil War
3. Permanent Settlement
4. Decline of industries
5. Textile industry
6. Dadabhai Naoroji
7. Poverty and Un-British Rule in India
8. Battle of Plassey
9. Captive market
10. European planters

Assignments

1. Examine the process of commercialisation of agriculture in colonial India. Discuss the factors that facilitated this transformation and analyse its impact on Indian agrarian society.
2. What is meant by deindustrialisation in the context of colonial India? Explain the major causes and stages that led to the decline of traditional industries.
3. Discuss the economic condition of India before deindustrialisation and evaluate how colonial policies contributed to the weakening of indigenous industries.
4. Analyse Dadabhai Naoroji's Drain Theory. Explain the mechanisms through which wealth was transferred from India to Britain during colonial rule.

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BLOCK

1857 Revolt and its Aftermath



UNIT

Early Resistance Before 1857

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the economic, social, political, and cultural factors that led to the revolt of 1857
- ◆ describe how policies related to land, revenue, forests, and trade created widespread discontent
- ◆ assess how these early struggles contributed to the development of a broader anti-colonial consciousness
- ◆ understand how early resistance movements laid the foundation for the revolt of 1857

Prerequisite

As the British East India Company slowly expanded its control, many groups across the country began to feel the strain of foreign domination. Farmers faced heavier taxes, tribal communities lost their forests, local rulers saw their authority weaken, and ordinary people sensed that their way of life was being disrupted.

Long before the famous Revolt of 1857, people in different regions had already begun to resist these changes. Some fought to protect their land and traditions, others opposed unjust policies, and many took up whatever weapons they had - bows, axes, or sheer determination to defend their freedom. These early acts of defiance did not always succeed, but they revealed a growing spirit of resistance among the Indian people.

These scattered struggles, though often forgotten, formed the first sparks of a larger national awakening. They showed that the desire for freedom was already

alive long before the great uprising of 1857. With this understanding, let us now explore the various forms of early resistance and the brave leaders and communities who stood against colonial rule even before 1857.

Keywords

Zamindars, Poligars, Sanyasi Rebellion, Tribal Uprisings, Santhals, Kols, Munda Rebellion

Discussion

The Revolt of 1857 was the most striking expression of India's long struggle against foreign domination. However, it did not erupt suddenly; rather, it represented the outcome of nearly a century of continuous resistance to British rule. The expansion of British power in India was a slow process, marked by gradual conquest, consolidation, and steady colonial penetration of the economy and society. At every stage, this process created discontent and provoked opposition. Over the years, this resistance took many forms, the most prominent being civil rebellions, tribal uprisings, and peasant revolts. This unit focuses on the struggle against British rule before 1857.

Civil rebellions formed a recurring pattern during the first century of British rule in India. They were frequently led by dispossessed rulers, deposed rajas, nawabs, or their heirs, as well as by displaced zamindars, landlords, poligars of South India, and former officials or retainers of annexed states. These uprisings drew strength from ordinary people: heavily burdened peasants, ruined artisans, and disbanded soldiers. Most of these rebellions were sudden and confined to specific regions, often sparked by local grievances, though some briefly spread more widely and mobilised bands ranging from a few hundred to several thousand fighters.

2.1.1 Causes for the Early Resistance Movements

The deeper cause behind this wave of civil unrest lay in the sweeping economic, administrative, and revenue policies introduced by the British. These changes disrupted the traditional agrarian structure and brought prolonged misery to those who depended on it. Above all, the colonial obsession with extracting as much revenue as possible from the land created turmoil in village life and sparked repeated outbursts of rebellion. For example, in Bengal, within just three decades of British rule, land revenue demands had almost doubled compared to what the Mughals once collected. This same pattern soon spread across other regions as colonial authority expanded. What made matters worse for farmers was that none of this additional revenue was reinvested in agriculture or used to improve the lives of cultivators. At the same time, countless zamindars and poligars were stripped of their land rights, either because the colonial government abolished them outright or because they were forced to sell their holdings when they could not keep up with the crushing revenue demands.

The dispossessed zamindars and poligars felt their humiliation even more deeply when their lands were taken over by outsiders,

colonial officials, wealthy merchants, and moneylenders, who lacked any traditional ties to the soil. Many of these old chiefs, stripped of their estates and authority, carried bitter personal grievances against the new rulers. Meanwhile, peasants and artisans had their own reasons for allying with the traditional elite. The ever-increasing land revenue demands drove countless cultivators into debt or forced them to sell off their lands. The new landlords, unlike the older ones who had at least a sense of responsibility toward their tenants, showed no such concern. They imposed crushing rents and evicted peasants without hesitation if payments were not made. This steady economic decline of the rural population found stark expression in the twelve major famines and numerous smaller ones that struck between 1770 and 1857.

The introduction of new courts and a formal legal system only exacerbated the plight of those losing their land. These institutions often became tools that strengthened the hands of the wealthy, allowing them to exploit the poor more ruthlessly. Cultivators who fell behind on rent, revenue, or debt repayments were frequently subjected to harsh punishments such as flogging, imprisonment, and even torture. Ordinary people also bore the brunt of rampant corruption within the lower levels of the police, judiciary, and local administration. Petty officials took advantage of their positions to line their own pockets at the expense of the poor. The police, in particular, became notorious for looting, harassment, and brutality.

The decline of India's handicraft industries, brought about by the introduction of free trade and the imposition of unfair tariffs that favoured British goods, reduced millions of artisans to poverty. Their plight worsened with the loss of traditional patrons - princes, zamindars, and local chieftains - who had once sustained their crafts. Similarly, scholars, priests, pandits, maulvis, and men

of letters, who had long relied on the financial support of indigenous rulers and elites, found themselves abandoned as this system of patronage collapsed under British rule. The impoverishment of these groups added fuel to the growing discontent. Above all, the very foreign nature of British authority stirred deep resentment. Like any other people, Indians felt humiliated by being ruled by outsiders, and this wounded sense of pride gave rise to repeated attempts to drive the foreign power out of their land.

2.1.2 Early Resistance Movements

2.1.2.1 Civil Uprisings

Civil uprisings began almost as soon as British authority took hold in Bengal and Bihar, spreading steadily as new areas were drawn into colonial control. Hardly a year passed without some form of armed resistance, and rarely did a decade go by without a large-scale rebellion in one part of the country or another. Between 1763 and 1856, India witnessed more than forty major rebellions, alongside hundreds of smaller ones.

The earliest of these was the Sanyasi Rebellion (1763–1800), led by displaced peasants, demobilised soldiers, wandering monks, and dispossessed zamindars of Bengal. This uprising later gained literary fame through Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel *Anand Math*. Soon after came the Chuar Uprising, which shook five districts of Bengal and Bihar between 1766 and 1772 and again from 1795 to 1816. Other significant revolts in eastern India included the Rangpur and Dinajpur uprising (1783), the Bishnupur and Birbhum rebellion (1799), the struggles of the Orissa zamindars (1804–1817), and the Sambalpur revolt (1827–1840).

In South India, resistance against British authority was frequent and widespread.



The leaders of these revolts, often semi-feudal chiefs and traditional elites, were rooted in old social and political systems. Their outlook was conservative, shaped by a desire to preserve the past rather than engage with the changing realities of the modern world that had already undermined their society's foundations. Their struggles did not put forward any new vision for society; instead, they sought a return to earlier forms of rule and social relations. Due to their backward-looking aims and their scattered, sporadic, and uncoordinated nature, these uprisings were unable to challenge, let alone overthrow, colonial power.

The British gradually managed to suppress the rebellions, tackling one region after another. They offered concessions to the less aggressive rebel chiefs and zamindars, restoring their estates, reinstating them in power, or lowering revenue demands, on the condition that they accepted British authority and remained quiet. Those who refused to compromise were crushed without mercy; for instance, Velu Thampi was publicly hanged even after his death.

This firm suppression of civil uprisings was one of the main reasons why the Revolt of 1857 did not spread to most parts of South India or to large areas of the East and West. Yet, these struggles were strong and significant in Indian history. They created enduring local traditions of resistance to foreign rule, traditions that later inspired the broader nationalist movement for independence.

2.1.2.2 Tribal Uprisings

Throughout the 19th century, tribal communities across large parts of India rose in revolt and again, staging hundreds of uprisings. These movements were characterised by extraordinary courage and sacrifice from the tribals, met in turn with ruthless repression and violence by the colonial rulers.



There were many reasons for their anger. British rule ended their relative isolation and drew them into the framework of colonial control. Tribal chiefs were turned into zamindars, while new systems of land revenue and taxation were imposed. Missionaries were encouraged to enter tribal areas, altering their cultural environment. Most damaging of all was the influx of moneylenders, traders, and revenue farmers, who became the intermediaries between the tribals and the colonial economy. These outsiders steadily took over tribal lands, trapping the people in cycles of debt, and stripping them of their independence. Over time, the tribals were pushed off their communal lands and reduced to the status of impoverished tenants, sharecroppers, or agricultural labourers on fields that had once been their own.

Colonial rule deeply altered the tribals' relationship with the forest, which had long been central to their survival. Forests provided them with food, fuel, and fodder, and they practised shifting cultivation, moving to new plots when old ones became less fertile. The British disrupted this system by seizing forest lands, restricting access to forest produce and village commons, and prohibiting the shifting of cultivation to fresh areas.

Adding to their misery, petty officials and policemen exploited the tribals through harassment and extortion, while revenue farmers and government agents expanded the practice of begar, forcing them into unpaid labour. Though the degree of oppression varied across regions, the destruction of their traditional agrarian system was a common thread linking tribal uprisings everywhere.

These revolts were not small, isolated acts but large-scale movements involving entire communities. The intrusion of traders, moneylenders, and revenue farmers shattered tribal autonomy and threatened their very

identity. Yet, in rebellion, they drew strength from their ethnic bonds; fellow tribals stood united, and no one was attacked unless they had sided with the colonial authorities.

Most rebellions began when oppression reached a breaking point, leaving the tribals with no option but to rise in defiance. The first response was often spontaneous, involving the raiding of villages, seizing of property, and driving out those seen as exploiters. Such acts soon brought them into direct confrontation with colonial authorities. Once that happened, the movements quickly grew into armed resistance, with the beginnings of organised action.

In many situations, the rural poor joined the tribal groups that rose in rebellion. These uprisings usually broke out when the tribals felt pushed to a point where resistance seemed like their only option. Their anger often erupted in sudden attacks on outsiders, taking back goods or driving them out of the villages. Such actions inevitably brought them into conflict with the colonial authorities. As these confrontations grew, the tribal groups gradually shifted towards armed resistance and began forming basic organisational structures.

Many of these tribal leaders claimed that their authority came directly from God. They often asserted they had special powers, such as the ability to make enemy bullets harmless. Inspired by these beliefs, the tribal communities followed their leaders with great faith and determination. However, the battles between the tribal rebels and the British forces were completely one-sided. The British fought with well-trained regiments and modern weapons, while the tribals, both men and women, joined together in small moving groups, armed only with simple tools like stones, axes, spears, and bows. Trusting in the supposed magical powers of their leaders, they faced the enemy bravely,



but the odds were heavily against them. In this unequal struggle, thousands upon thousands of tribal people lost their lives.

Santhal Uprising

Among the many tribal uprisings, the Santhal *hool* or rebellion was the largest and most powerful. The Santhals living in the region between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, an area known as Daman-i-koh, rose in defiance. They tried to drive out the outsiders, whom they called *dikus*, and declared their aim to completely destroy the oppressive foreign rule.

The Santhals viewed the *dikus* and government officials as morally corrupt individuals who begged, stole, lied, and drank excessively. By 1854, their village leaders, the *majhis* and *parganites*, had begun meeting secretly to discuss the possibility of an uprising. Occasional incidents of robbing zamindars and moneylenders also started to appear.

On 30 June 1855, the rebel leaders gathered nearly 6,000 Santhals from around 400 villages at Bhaganidihi. There, they resolved to rise in revolt, drive out the outsiders and their colonial rulers, and establish *Salyug*, a new era of truth and justice. The Santhals believed that God supported their cause. The main leaders, Sido and Kanhu, declared that *Thakur* (God) had spoken to them directly, urging them to take up arms and fight for freedom.

The leaders rallied Santhal men and women by leading large processions through the villages, accompanied by drummers and other musicians. Before long, nearly 60,000 Santhals had joined the movement. They organised themselves into groups of 1,500 to 2,000, and on special occasions, they gathered in much larger numbers at the sound of the drums. These groups launched attacks on moneylenders, zamindars, their houses, police stations, railway construction sites,

postal carriers, essentially every symbol of exploitation and colonial authority.

Once the government understood how widespread and powerful the rebellion had become, it launched a major military campaign to crush the uprising. The government responded by deploying several regiments under the command of a major-general, imposing martial law in the affected region, and announcing rewards of up to Rs. 10,000 for the capture of key leaders. The revolt was suppressed with brutal force. More than 15,000 Santhals were killed, and dozens of villages were completely destroyed. Sido was betrayed, captured, and killed in August 1855. Kanhu was arrested much later, almost by chance, near the final phase of the uprising in February 1856.

Kols

The Kols of Chhotanagpur rose in rebellion between 1820 and 1837. The British crushed the revolt with extreme violence, killing thousands before they were able to restore control.

Rampa Rebellion

In Andhra, the hill tribes of Rampa rebelled in March 1879, protesting against the abuses of a government-backed *mansabdar* and the newly imposed forest restrictions. To suppress this uprising, the authorities had to deploy infantry regiments, a cavalry squadron, and two companies of sappers and miners. After months of fighting, the rebels, who numbered in the thousands, were finally defeated by the end of 1880.

Munda Rebellion

The *ulgulan*, or rebellion of the Munda tribes led by Birsa Munda, took place between 1899 and 1900. For more than three decades, the Munda *sardars* had been resisting the destruction of their traditional system of communal land ownership, which was being

undermined by the growing influence of *jagirdars*, *thikadars* (revenue farmers), and moneylenders.

Birsa Munda, born in 1874 into a poor sharecropper's family, experienced a vision of God in 1895. After this, he proclaimed himself a divine messenger with miraculous healing abilities. Thousands of Mundas gathered around him, believing he was a saviour bringing a new spiritual message and hope for liberation.

The religious movement around Birsa soon took on strong agrarian and political overtones. Birsa travelled from village to village, holding meetings and rallying people by blending spiritual ideas with a call for social and political change. On Christmas Eve in 1899, he declared a full-scale uprising to restore Munda rule over their land. He urged his followers to rise against the *thikadars*, *jagirdars*, local rulers, officials, and Christian missionaries, proclaiming that *Satyug*, an age of truth, would replace the present *Kalyug*.

Birsa warned that a confrontation with the *dikus* was coming and that "the ground would be as red as the red flag with their blood." At the same time, he instructed that the non-tribal poor were not to be harmed. To fight for this liberation, he gathered an army of nearly 6,000 Mundas armed with traditional weapons such as swords, spears, axes, and bows. In early February 1900, Birsa was captured by the authorities, and he died in jail in June of the same year. Though the rebellion was ultimately suppressed, Birsa Munda became a legendary figure whose memory continues to inspire generations.

2.1.2.3 Peasant Uprisings

British colonial rule brought deep changes to India's rural economy. The introduction of new land revenue systems, along with unfamiliar administrative and judicial structures, disrupted traditional agrarian relations. At the same time, the decline of indigenous

handicrafts pushed many artisans back onto the land, increasing pressure on agriculture and worsening rural poverty. Several peasant uprisings took place during this period.

Indigo Revolt

The Indigo Revolt was the most intense and widespread peasant uprising of its time. It broke out in Bengal in 1859–60 against European indigo planters who compelled cultivators to grow indigo under highly exploitative conditions. These planters, operating factories in the rural mofussil areas, forced tenants into a system that brought heavy losses to the peasants.

Cultivators were made to accept small cash advances and sign deceptive contracts that bound them to grow indigo. The price they received for the crop was far below its real value. Peasants were often compelled to use their most fertile land for indigo instead of more profitable food crops like rice. Even when the crop was delivered, payments were manipulated, and bribes to factory officials were common.

The advance system trapped cultivators in a cycle of debt. Although theoretically repayable, in practice peasants were rarely allowed to clear their dues. The advance became a tool to ensure continued indigo cultivation season after season. When legal enforcement of these contracts proved slow or uncertain, planters frequently resorted to intimidation and violence. Instances of kidnapping, illegal confinement, flogging, assaults on women and children, seizure of cattle, looting, arson, and destruction of homes and crops were reported. Many planters maintained bands of armed retainers (*lathials*) to enforce their demands.

Tensions reached a breaking point in the autumn of 1859, when cultivators believed they had gained official backing. On 17 August 1859, Hem Chandra Kar, a Deputy Magistrate, issued a proclamation stating that



in disputes involving indigo ryots, peasants would retain possession of their land and could grow whatever crops they chose, and that the police should prevent interference by planters. Although this order exceeded his authority and stemmed from a misinterpretation of official communication, it emboldened the peasants and helped ignite open resistance.

As word of Kar's proclamation travelled across Bengal, many cultivators began to believe that the moment had arrived to challenge the oppressive indigo system. At first, they chose peaceful methods. Petitions were submitted to officials, and meetings and demonstrations were organised to demand justice. However, in September 1859, the situation escalated. Peasants openly declared that they would no longer cultivate indigo under coercion. When planters, supported by armed *lathiyals* and often backed by the police and courts, tried to force compliance, the ryots resisted.

The first decisive stand came from the cultivators of Govindpur village in Nadia district. Led by Digambar Biswas and Bishnu Biswas, both former employees of an indigo planter, they refused to continue indigo cultivation. On 13 September, when a planter dispatched nearly a hundred armed men to intimidate the village, the peasants organised themselves, armed with lathis and spears, and fought back.

From there, the movement spread swiftly across the indigo-growing regions of Bengal. Cultivators refused advances, declined to sign contracts, and pledged not to sow indigo. When attacked, they defended themselves with whatever was available—sticks, bows and arrows, slings, bricks, and even household items thrown by women.

By early 1860, the agitation had intensified and covered nearly all the indigo-producing districts. Factories were targeted, and villages collectively resisted attempts to arrest

their leaders. In several instances, clashes occurred between peasants and police forces. Dinabandhu Mitra's play *Nil Darpan* earned widespread recognition for its powerful and realistic depiction of the suffering and exploitation endured by indigo cultivators at the hands of European planters.

The planters then used their powers as zamindars to pressure the ryots, threatening eviction or raising rents. In response, peasants launched rent strikes, refusing to pay increased demands and physically blocking eviction efforts. Over time, they also began to use legal channels more effectively. They pooled resources to contest court cases and even filed suits against planters. Social boycott was another strategy; they isolated planters by persuading their workers and servants to leave them.

Facing sustained and organised resistance, the planters gradually found it impossible to continue. One factory after another shut down, and by the end of 1860, indigo cultivation had largely disappeared from Bengal.

Pabna

By the early 1870s, cultivators had reached a breaking point and were no longer willing to quietly endure the growing pressure from landlords. In May 1873, peasants in Yusufshahi Parganah of Pabna district came together to form a League aimed at resisting the unjust demands of the zamindars. The League held large public gatherings where peasants assembled in significant numbers. These groups would move from village to village, urging fellow cultivators to unite and stand firm, while also sending a clear message to the landlords that their authority would no longer go unchallenged. One of their main strategies was a collective refusal to pay the increased rents.

The movement gradually spread beyond Pabna to other parts of eastern Bengal. Similar agrarian bodies were formed in different

districts, rent strikes continued, and disputes were taken to court. The struggle was largely marked by organised and lawful resistance rather than widespread violence. Clashes occurred only when landlords attempted to enforce their demands through coercion. Incidents such as attacks on police stations or the looting of zamindars' houses were rare, and serious harm to landlords or their agents was uncommon.

Whenever clashes turned violent, the colonial authorities openly sided with the zamindars. Large numbers of peasants were arrested and strict measures were taken to restore order. However, in cases where disputes were pursued through legal channels or peaceful protest, the government generally maintained a stance of formal neutrality. At the same time, it indicated that reforms would be introduced to shield tenants from the harshest practices of the zamindari system. This assurance eventually resulted, though not very effectively, in the passing of the Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885.

Deccan Riots

In 1875, serious agrarian unrest broke out in the Poona and Ahmednagar regions of Maharashtra. Under the Ryotwari system operating there, the state dealt directly with individual cultivators, recognising them as landholders responsible for paying revenue straight to the government. In theory, this gave peasants ownership rights. In practice, however, many struggled to meet heavy revenue demands and were forced to borrow from moneylenders. Gradually, mounting debts led to the loss of land and deep resentment.

Relations between peasants and moneylenders became increasingly strained, especially since many of the creditors were outsiders, mainly Marwaris and Gujaratis, who were viewed with suspicion and hostility. Several wider economic changes aggravated the crisis. During the early 1860s,

the American Civil War had boosted demand for Indian cotton, raising prices and encouraging cultivation. But when the war ended in 1864, cotton exports declined sharply and prices collapsed. Many cultivators who had expanded production suddenly found themselves in financial distress. Matters worsened in 1867 when the government significantly increased land revenue assessments, reportedly by nearly half. A series of poor harvests further deepened rural hardship.

Under these pressures, peasants had little choice but to seek more loans, which allowed moneylenders to tighten their control over land and property. As debt grew and conditions deteriorated, anger increasingly focused on the moneylenders, who were seen as the immediate source of suffering. The atmosphere was tense, and it required only a small incident to trigger an open revolt.

Malabar Rebellion

In Malabar, British rule was met with resistance from many sections of society, including local chiefs, members of royal families, landlords, peasants, and tribal communities. Among these, the strongest and most prolonged opposition came from the Mappila peasantry in the southern taluks of Ernad, Valluvanad, and Ponnani. From the 1830s to the 1880s, these regions became the centre of several agrarian uprisings. The protests were directed not only against the British authorities but also against the Hindu upper-caste landlords who controlled the land.

The root cause of these movements lay in the agrarian policies imposed by the colonial government. After Mysorean rule ended, the British reinstated the earlier social and economic system, which placed landownership firmly in the hands of upper-caste Hindu landlords and turned land into private property. This shift triggered widespread unrest, especially in the southern



taluks. Between 1836 and 1853 alone, twelve major uprisings were recorded.

Rural poverty and disruptions in agriculture, exacerbated by British policies, pushed peasants into revolt. The British extracted a high amount of land revenue from Malabar; for example, in 1821, the collection reached 94,749. Their revenue system had two defining features: the state claimed the largest portion of the agricultural produce, and the landlord (*Janmi*) was recognised as the absolute owner of the land. These measures reinforced the power of upper-caste landlords and deepened the hardships of the peasants, setting the stage for repeated resistance.

The British collected an extremely large share of land revenue in Malabar. In some southern taluks like Ernad, Valluvanad, Palghat, and Ponnani, they took almost 70% of the income from agricultural crops. Under this system, revenue agreements were made with intermediaries and *janmies*. The actual cultivators, the peasants who worked the land, received only about one-third of what they produced.

At the same time, Malabar's population was growing. However, there was no new industry, no technological improvement, and no increase in cultivable land. This created serious pressure on the tenants. The government often demanded more produce than the fixed land revenue. Because land was limited and demand for it was high, landlords could easily raise rents and evict tenants more frequently.

Evictions became another major cause of unrest. Tenants could be thrown out for many minor reasons: late rent, failure to offer customary gifts, not obeying social rules, or even an accidental remark. The competitive tenancy system forced peasants to produce

surplus, pay heavy rents, and borrow money from intermediaries. This pushed many families into poverty and increased their fear of eviction. All these pressures, poverty, debt, high rents, and constant insecurity led peasants in the southern taluks to revolt. Some attacked and killed oppressive landlords. They did not run away afterward, as many believed they were sacrificing themselves for a higher cause and saw their actions in terms of *shahid* (martyrdom).

British officials tried to explain these uprisings as religious conflicts, usually portraying them as clashes between Hindu landlords and Mappila peasants. However, the Mappila peasants were primarily reacting to harsh British policies and exploitative landlords. Later, William Logan clearly linked these revolts to rural poverty and the deep agricultural distress in the region.

Peasant Uprisings in Maharashtra, Punjab and Assam

In Maharashtra, Vasudev Balwant Phadke, a clerk by profession, mobilised a small band of Ramosi peasants in 1879 and carried out acts of what has been described as social banditry against oppressive elements.

In Punjab, the Kuka Revolt, led by Baba Ram Singh, combined agrarian grievances with a strong religious and reformist spirit. The rebellion was ruthlessly suppressed in 1872, when 49 rebels were executed by being blown from cannons.

Similarly, in the Assam plains, excessive land revenue demands triggered serious peasant disturbances in 1893–94. The authorities responded with force, and many protesters lost their lives in police firing and bayonet attacks.

Recap

- ◆ The Revolt of 1857 was not sudden; it was the culmination of nearly a century of resistance against British rule.
- ◆ British expansion was gradual and involved economic exploitation, administrative control, and social intrusion, provoking continuous opposition.
- ◆ Resistance before 1857 mainly took the form of: civil rebellions, tribal uprisings, peasant revolts.
- ◆ Led by dispossessed rulers, deposed nawabs, rajas, zamindars, poligars, and former officials.
- ◆ Supported by peasants, ruined artisans, and disbanded soldiers.
- ◆ Mostly localised, sudden, and short-lived, though some spread temporarily.
- ◆ Santhal Uprising (1855–56)- largest and most organised tribal revolt.
- ◆ Kol Rebellion (1820–37)- triggered by land alienation and outsider exploitation.
- ◆ Munda Rebellion / Ulgulan (1899–1900)- aimed to restore communal land ownership.
- ◆ In Malabar, the Mappila Rebellions recurred periodically.
- ◆ In Maharashtra, Vasudev Balwant Phadke mobilised a small band of Ramosi peasants in 1879

Objective Questions

1. Which novel popularised the Sanyasi Rebellion?
2. Who wrote *Anand Math*?
3. In which region did the Sanyasi Rebellion occur?
4. How many major famines occurred between 1770 and 1857?
5. Which British policy ruined Indian handicraft industries?
6. Who were the leaders of the Santhal rebellion?
7. Which tribal rebellion occurred in Chhotanagpur?

8. Who led the Munda rebellion?
9. In which year did the Santhal uprising begin?
10. When did the Raja of Vizianagaram rise in revolt?

Answers

1. *Anand Math*
2. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee
3. Bengal
4. Twelve
5. Free trade
6. Sido and Kanhu
7. Kol Rebellion
8. Birsa Munda
9. 1855
10. 1794

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of Indigo revolt.
2. Compare the nature of leadership in tribal revolts and peasant uprisings before 1857.
3. Discuss the causes and consequences of the Sanyasi revolt.
4. Evaluate the role of tribal uprisings (Santhal, Kol, Munda, etc.) in resisting British colonial policies.
5. How did peasant revolts such as the Indigo Rebellion and Moplah uprisings reflect agrarian distress under colonial rule?

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UNIT

Causes of the Revolt of 1857 - Differing Perspectives

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ compare how different sections of Indian society interpreted and responded to colonial policies
- ◆ discuss how historians differ in their explanations of the revolt's causes
- ◆ understand the variety of interpretations offered by British historians, nationalist historians, and modern scholars
- ◆ grasp how differing perspectives on the causes of the revolt contribute to a deeper understanding of its nature, extent, and legacy

Prerequisite

The Revolt of 1857 in India cannot be explained by any one cause or single trigger. The events that unfolded were the result of diverse grievances experienced by different sections of society - soldiers, peasants, artisans, dispossessed rulers, and ordinary people, each reacting to British rule in their own way. Historians interpret the revolt from different perspectives. Some consider it mainly a military uprising led by the sepoys who protested against discriminatory practices and the use of greased cartridges. Others argue that it was a broader popular movement that drew support from peasants, artisans, tribal communities, and local rulers affected by British policies. Nationalist historians go further, viewing it as India's First War of Independence, emphasising how varied groups united to challenge colonial power and protect their traditions, rights, and homeland.

Keywords

Greased Cartridge, Zamindars, Taluqdars, Sepoys, Civilians, Doctrine of Lapse, Huge Rose

Discussion

2.2.1 Causes of the Revolt

2.2.1.1 Unpopularity of British rule

A major reason for the growing dislike of British rule was its deeply foreign character. The British never stopped being outsiders in India. Unlike earlier invaders who eventually blended with local society, the British kept themselves apart, even from the highest Indian elites. They carried a strong sense of racial superiority and often treated Indians with open contempt. As Sayyid Ahmad Khan later observed, even the most respected Indians approached British officials “with inward fear and trembling.”

Above all, the British did not come to make India their home. Their primary goal was to accumulate wealth and then return to Britain. Ordinary Indians understood this well. They never saw the British as their well-wishers and viewed their actions with constant suspicion. This created a general, simmering anti-British sentiment, which had already been visible in several local uprisings long before the Revolt of 1857.

The period of rising popular discontent also saw a number of events that shook people’s long-held belief in the unbeatable strength of the British. Several major military setbacks damaged the image of British invincibility. The British suffered heavy losses in the First Afghan War (1838–42), struggled in the Punjab Wars (1845–49), and faced difficulties again in the Crimean War (1854–56).

2.2.1.2 Annexation Policy of Dalhousie

The annexation of Awadh by Lord Dalhousie in 1856 created deep resentment across India, particularly within Awadh itself. It stirred anger not only among the people of the region but also within the Company’s army. Most of the sepoys serving in the Bengal Army came from Awadh. Although they did not feel a strong sense of Indian unity at the time, they did have strong regional loyalties. They had helped the British expand their rule elsewhere, but they could not accept that their own homeland should fall under foreign control.

The annexation also hurt the sepoys financially. Their families back home now had to pay higher land taxes, which added to their growing frustration with the British. The traditional landed aristocracy of Awadh suffered even more severely. Awadh became one of the main centres of the Revolt partly because its *taluqdars*, local landholders, lost virtually all their authority and privileges. Around 21,000 of them saw their estates confiscated and suddenly found themselves without any source of income, unable to work, ashamed to beg, and condemned to poverty. Humiliated and embittered, these displaced landholders eagerly joined the uprising, seeing in the sepoys’ revolt a chance to challenge the British and reclaim their lost position.

Dalhousie justified the annexation of Awadh by claiming that he wanted to free the people from the oppression of the Nawab and



the *taluqdars*. However, in reality, the people gained nothing from British rule. Instead, the burden on ordinary residents grew heavier. They had to pay higher land revenue as well as new taxes on food items, houses, ferries, opium, and even the administration of justice. Peasants and traditional zamindars soon began losing their land to new landlords and moneylenders, just as they did in other parts of India. To make matters worse, the British confiscated most of the estates held by *taluqdars*. These dispossessed landholders, nursing deep resentment and humiliation, became some of the most determined enemies of British rule.

The annexation of Awadh and Dalhousie's earlier annexations alarmed the rulers of India's princely states. They realised that even the most loyal service to the British did not protect their territories from annexation. What further damaged British prestige was their repeated violation of written agreements, treaties, and promises. Although they claimed to be the protectors and friends of Indian rulers, they consistently reduced them to subordination.

This aggressive policy turned several prominent leaders against the British. Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Baji Rao II, became an enemy after the British refused to grant him the pension they had paid to his father. The Rani of Jhansi was outraged when the British insisted on annexing her state and refused to recognise her adopted son's right of succession. Even the Mughal dynasty suffered humiliation; in 1849, Dalhousie ordered that Bahadur Shah's successor would have to leave the Red Fort and move to a modest house at Qutub. In 1856, Lord Canning decreed that after Bahadur Shah's death, his heirs would no longer be addressed as kings but only as princes.

2.2.1.4 Introduction of New Social Reforms

The conservative religious feelings of many Indians were stirred by certain humanitarian reforms that the British government introduced, often based on the advice of Indian social reformers. Many people felt that a foreign, Christian government had no right to interfere in their religious practices or social customs. Reforms such as banning *sati*, allowing widows to remarry, and encouraging girls to receive a Western education were seen as unwelcome meddling in sacred traditions.

Religious sentiments were further hurt when the British decided to impose taxes on lands belonging to temples, mosques, priests, and charitable institutions, lands that earlier Indian rulers had exempted from taxation. Many Brahmin and Muslim families depended on the income from these lands, and the new policy left them angry and resentful. They began to spread the belief that the British were deliberately attempting to weaken and destroy the religions of India.

2.2.1.5 Discontent among Sepoys

The Revolt of 1857 began with the uprising of the Company's sepoys. To understand why these soldiers, who had once helped the British conquer much of India through loyal service, suddenly turned against them, we must remember that sepoys were also members of Indian society. They shared the same hopes, fears, and frustrations as the people around them. When their families and communities suffered under British economic policies, the sepoys felt that pain too.

Like others, they believed that the British were interfering in Indian religions and trying to push Christianity. Their own experiences strengthened this suspicion; they saw army chaplains being paid by the state, and some

British officers openly preaching Christianity within the ranks. The sepoys also had specific religious and caste concerns of their own. Indian society at the time observed strict caste rules, yet the military authorities banned sepoys from wearing caste marks, sectarian symbols, certain beards, or turbans.

Another major grievance arose in 1856 when a new law required all recruits to be willing to serve overseas. This deeply hurt the feelings of Hindu soldiers, as crossing the sea was considered a violation of religious norms and was believed to cause a loss of caste. All these factors combined created resentment and fear, eventually pushing the sepoys toward rebellion.

2.2.1.6 Religion

A major reason why people gradually turned against British rule was the growing fear that their religion was under threat. This anxiety was fuelled largely by the activities of Christian missionaries, who were present almost everywhere, schools, hospitals, prisons, and even busy marketplaces. Their efforts to convert people, along with their harsh criticisms of Hindu and Muslim beliefs and practices, deeply offended local communities. Many felt that their age-old customs were being mocked and dismissed.

What made the situation worse was the belief that the colonial government openly supported these missionaries. The police often protected them, and the few conversions that did occur were seen by ordinary people as clear signs that their religion was in danger. Certain government actions strengthened this suspicion. For instance, in 1850, a law was passed allowing a person who converted to Christianity to still inherit family property, something many Indians viewed as unfair and intrusive. In addition, the government funded Christian chaplains in the army, and several civil and military officials took it upon themselves to promote missionary activities.

They even introduced Christian teachings in government schools and, at times, inside prisons. All of this convinced many Indians that the British were not just ruling the land; they were also trying to reshape their faith and way of life.

At the same time, many British officials, influenced by utilitarian ideas, began introducing social reforms. Although these reforms were meant to “improve” society, they created widespread distrust. Conservative Hindus and Muslims feared that such laws were an attack on their faith, customs, and cultural identity. Many also believed that these reforms were designed to help Christian missionaries in their efforts to spread Christianity. This fear united religious groups and orthodox communities against the British.

2.2.1.7 Decline of Arts and Handicrafts

British rule brought severe hardship to India’s artisans and craftsmen. When the Company began annexing Indian kingdoms, these skilled workers lost the royal patronage that had long supported them. On top of this, British economic policies deliberately pushed aside traditional Indian handicrafts while flooding the market with British-made goods. As a result, many talented artisans suddenly found themselves without work. Furthermore, since the decline of handicrafts was not matched by the rise of modern industries, there were hardly any alternative jobs for them to turn to.

2.2.1.8 Immediate Cause

The issue of the greased cartridges acted like a spark that ignited the sepoys’ anger, and their uprising, in turn, created an opportunity for ordinary people to join the revolt. The British had recently introduced the new Enfield rifle, which required soldiers to bite open cartridges wrapped in greased paper



before loading them. It soon spread among the sepoys that the grease used on these cartridges contained the fat of cows and pigs. For both Hindu and Muslim soldiers, this was deeply offensive and a direct threat to their religious beliefs. Many became convinced

that the British government was deliberately trying to undermine their faith. Feeling that their religion and dignity were under attack, the sepoys believed the moment to rise in rebellion had finally arrived.

Recap

- ◆ The Revolt of 1857 was the result of long-standing political, economic, military, and religious grievances, not a sudden outbreak.
- ◆ Sepoys, mainly upper-caste Hindus from Oudh and the North-Western Provinces, felt their caste practices and religious beliefs were increasingly threatened.
- ◆ The Barrackpore incident of 1824 and the hardships of the Afghan War deepened sepoy resentment.
- ◆ Dalhousie's annexation of Awadh (1856) deeply angered sepoys, taluqdars, and peasants.
- ◆ Thousands of taluqdars lost their estates and became active supporters of the revolt.
- ◆ Annexation policies alarmed Indian princes and violated treaties and promises.
- ◆ Social reforms, such as the ban on sati and widow remarriage, were seen as interference in religion.
- ◆ The greased cartridges acted as the immediate trigger for the rebellion.

Objective Questions

1. In which year did the first clear sepoy protest occur?
2. Which war deepened sepoy religious difficulties after 1824?
3. Which war shattered British military prestige most severely?
4. Which tribal uprising challenged British authority in 1855–56?
5. Who annexed Awadh in 1856?
6. What acted as the immediate spark of the revolt?

Answers

1. 1824
2. Afghan War
3. First Afghan War
4. Santhal rebellion
5. Lord Dalhousie
6. Greased cartridges

Assignments

1. Examine the role of economic exploitation under the British in fuelling the revolt.
2. How did religious and social factors contribute to the discontent that led to the Revolt of 1857?
3. Discuss the Revolt of 1857 as a reaction of the Indian soldiers (sepoys) against colonial rule.
4. Critically examine the debate: Was the Revolt of 1857 a 'Sepoy Mutiny' or the 'First War of Indian Independence'?
5. How do modern historians interpret the Revolt of 1857 compared to contemporary British accounts?

Reference

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Suggested Reading

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SGOU



UNIT

Prominent Leaders and Nature of the Revolt

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the roles played by these leaders in different regions of India
- ◆ describe how the Revolt of 1857 was a widespread but regionally varied uprising, involving soldiers, peasants, zamindars, and local rulers
- ◆ explain the military, political, social, and economic grievances that shaped the character of the revolt
- ◆ assess how the courage, strategies, and limitations of leaders shaped the progress of the revolt

Prerequisite

Imagine India in the mid-nineteenth century, a land rich in kingdoms, traditions, and diverse communities, yet slowly losing its freedom to the expanding power of the British East India Company. Across the country, different groups of people felt the weight of this growing control. Rulers saw their kingdoms annexed, soldiers faced discrimination, peasants struggled under heavy taxes, artisans lost their livelihoods, and ordinary people lived with daily injustices.

As these pressures increased, a sense of frustration and unrest began to spread like a silent fire. People from different backgrounds started to share a common feeling that something had to change. This shared dissatisfaction set the stage for a major uprising that would shake the foundations of British rule in India. Against this backdrop, several remarkable leaders emerged. They inspired courage, unity, and hope among the masses and played a decisive role in shaping the Revolt of 1857. With this picture in mind, let us now explore who these leaders were and understand the nature and significance of the great uprising they helped lead.

Keywords

Mangal Pandey, Bahadur Shah, Tantia Tope, Rani of Jhansi, Nana Saheb, Kunwar Singh, Khan Bahadur

Discussion

2.3.1 Leaders of the Revolt

Even before the uprising at Meerut, signs of unrest were already visible in several cantonments. At Berhampur, the 19th Native Infantry refused to use the newly introduced Enfield rifle and was disbanded in March 1857. Soon after, Mangal Pandey, a young sepoy of the 34th Native Infantry at Barrackpore, went further by firing at his Sergeant Major. He was quickly subdued, executed, and his regiment was also dissolved. The 7th Oudh Regiment faced the same fate after openly defying its officers. This young sepoy attacked his British officers on his own and was executed on 29 March 1857. His death became a symbol of resistance and revealed how deep the frustration within the ranks had grown.

The real spark, however, was lit at Meerut. On 24 April, ninety soldiers of the 3rd Native Cavalry refused to accept the greased cartridges. For this act of defiance, eighty-five of them were dismissed, shackled, and sentenced to ten years in prison on 9 May. This harsh punishment pushed the simmering anger into open revolt. The following day, 10 May, the Indian soldiers rose in mutiny, freed their imprisoned comrades, killed the British officers, and openly declared rebellion. As darkness fell, they marched towards Delhi as if pulled by an unseen force.

When the Meerut sepoys reached Delhi the next morning, the city's own soldiers joined them, attacked their European officers, and quickly took control of the capital. They then declared the ageing Bahadur Shah II as

the Emperor of India. Delhi soon became the heart of the uprising, and Bahadur Shah its unifying symbol. Though powerless in practice, the Mughal throne still carried immense emotional significance; centuries of Mughal rule had made it a familiar emblem of India's political unity. By rallying around the last Mughal emperor, the sepoys turned what had begun as a military mutiny into a movement of national character.

Rebels from different parts of the country instinctively moved towards Delhi, and Indian chiefs who joined the uprising pledged loyalty to Bahadur Shah. Influenced and perhaps pressured by the sepoys, the old emperor began writing letters to rulers across India, urging them to form a united front to overthrow British authority.

Soon after the first sparks of rebellion, the entire Bengal Army rose up, and the uprising spread with astonishing speed. Regions such as Awadh, Rohilkhand, the Doab, Bundelkhand, Central India, much of Bihar, and parts of East Punjab all threw off British control. In several princely states, the rulers remained loyal to the British, but their soldiers either rebelled or hovered on the edge of mutiny. Troops in Indore joined the uprising, and more than 20,000 soldiers from Gwalior sided with Tantia Tope and the Rani of Jhansi. Across Rajasthan and Maharashtra, many smaller chiefs revolted with the backing of local people who were already resentful of British rule. Even places like Hyderabad and Bengal witnessed local uprisings.

The revolt was not only widespread; it ran deep. Across northern and central India, the sepoys' mutiny was quickly followed by the participation of ordinary people. Once British authority collapsed in many areas, villagers and townsfolk rose up, armed with whatever they could find: axes, spears, bows, sticks, scythes, and old muskets. In some places, civilians rebelled even before the sepoys did, or in areas where no sepoy regiment existed at all. It was this mass involvement of peasants and artisans that gave the revolt real force and transformed it into a people's movement, especially in the regions that now form Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Here, peasants and displaced zamindars seized the moment to act on long-standing grievances. They attacked moneylenders and new landholders who had taken over their lands, burned debt records, and destroyed account books. British-run courts, tehsils (revenue offices), and police stations were also targeted. In many battles, ordinary villagers outnumbered the sepoy soldiers by a large margin. One estimate suggests that of the nearly 150,000 people who died fighting the British in Awadh, more than 100,000 were civilians, a reminder of how deeply the rebellion had taken root among the people.

The widespread support for the Revolt of 1857 became even clearer when the British began their counter-attack. To regain control, they launched a harsh and relentless campaign, not only against the rebel sepoys but also against ordinary people across Delhi, Awadh, the North-Western Provinces, Agra, Central India, and western Bihar. Entire villages were set on fire, and both rural and urban populations faced brutal massacres. Public hangings and summary executions were used to intimidate people, demonstrating just how deeply the uprising had taken root in these regions.

Despite the overwhelming force used against them, both the sepoys and the civilians fought with extraordinary courage until the very end. Though they were ultimately defeated, their determination and resolve never truly faded.

After Delhi was taken by the rebels, the uprising spread with remarkable speed to Kanpur, Lucknow, Benares, Allahabad, Bareilly, Jagdishpur, Jhansi, and many other centres. In each of these places, deep resentment toward British rule pushed people into action, and colonial authority crumbled quickly. Since the rebels lacked organised leadership of their own, they naturally turned to familiar figures - dispossessed nobles, traditional chiefs, and local aristocrats, who had also suffered under British policies.

In Kanpur, Nana Saheb emerged as the leading figure. As the adopted son of the last Peshwa, Baji Rao II, he had been stripped of his privileges and forced to live away from Poona. When the revolt began, he was already residing near Kanpur, and the rebels rallied around him without hesitation.

In Lucknow, Begum Hazrat Mahal took charge. With strong public support for the ousted Nawab, she stepped into the role of leader and proclaimed her young son, Birjis Qadir, as the new Nawab. Under her guidance, an organised administration was set up where both Hindus and Muslims held significant responsibilities.

At Bareilly, the mantle of leadership fell on Khan Bahadur, a descendant of Rohilkhand's former rulers. Although he had been quietly living on a British pension and had even warned officials about the likelihood of a mutiny, events soon pushed him into the heart of the rebellion. Once the revolt began, he assumed command, raised an impressive force of nearly 40,000 men, and put up a strong and sustained fight against the British.

In Bihar, the revolt found its strongest champion in Kunwar Singh, the elderly zamindar of Jagdishpur. Though nearly seventy and struggling with financial ruin, he carried a long-standing bitterness against the British, who had taken away his ancestral lands despite his many appeals for their restoration. He had not set out to lead an uprising, but when the sepoys from Dinapore arrived in Arrah, he did not hesitate. He stepped forward at once, embracing the rebellion with remarkable energy and commitment for a man of his age.

Among the leaders of the uprising, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi stood out as the most remarkable. After her husband's death, Governor-General Lord Dalhousie invoked the Doctrine of Lapse to annex Jhansi, denying her adopted son the right to succeed to the throne. The Rani made every effort to overturn this decision, even offering to administer Jhansi on behalf of the British if her son's claim was accepted. When all her appeals were ignored, she threw her lot in with the sepoys. Once committed, she emerged as one of the fiercest and most determined opponents the British had to face during the revolt.

2.3.2 Nature of the Revolt

One of the most debated aspects of the Revolt of 1857 is its character, and discussions on this question began almost as soon as the uprising broke out. Some observers at the time believed it to be an attempt by Muslims to re-establish the Mughal Empire, though little concrete evidence supported such a claim. The more widespread official view during that period was that the revolt was, at its core, a mutiny of Indian soldiers, while the involvement of civilians was seen as a secondary development that arose when disorder created space for lawless activity. This interpretation continued to influence later writings as well. For instance, historian S. N. Sen, in his government commissioned

centenary history of the revolt, argued along similar lines, stating that the uprising began as a military mutiny and only later turned into wider unrest as the administration collapsed and opportunistic elements gained ground.

R.C. Majumdar shared a similar perspective, arguing that the uprising began as a sepoy mutiny and, in certain regions, later drew in sections of the civilian population. According to him, this participation was often driven either by opportunistic local leaders or simply by mob violence that arose when administrative authority collapsed. Yet, not everyone agreed with this interpretation. Right from the time of the revolt, contrasting opinions were voiced. In the British Parliament, for instance, Benjamin Disraeli questioned whether the events should be seen merely as a military mutiny or as a broader national revolt. Around the same time, Karl Marx, writing in the *New York Daily Tribune*, echoed similar doubts, asserting that what the British regarded merely as a military mutiny was, in reality, a national uprising.

V.D. Savarkar was the first to firmly place the Revolt of 1857 within the framework of Indian nationalism. In his work *Indian War of Independence*, he described it as a struggle for *swadharma* and *swaraj*. This interpretation, however, was strongly rejected by historians like S.N. Sen and R.C. Majumdar. A different view emerged in 1959, when S.B. Chaudhuri argued that the uprising represented the first collective effort of various social classes to challenge foreign rule. Since then, the debate has continued, but a broad agreement has gradually developed that the revolt, while significant, cannot be classified as a nationalist movement in the modern sense of the term.

Writing in 1965, Thomas Metcalf observed that while most agreed the Revolt of 1857 was more than just a sepoy uprising, it still fell short of being a national revolt. Its popular base was largely confined to parts of northern

India, while many regions and communities chose to remain loyal to the British. Several groups actively collaborated with the British. For instance, the Bengali middle class, as Judith Brown notes, supported the British because they had material advantages in the new order and, in many cases, a genuine ideological belief in its values. Similarly, the princes of Punjab distrusted the Hindustani sepoys and dreaded any possibility of the Mughal Empire being revived.

C.A. Bayly pointed out that the rebels of 1857 were driven by different motives, many of which were not directly linked to opposition against British rule. In fact, rivalries among them often weakened the movement, and this lack of unity ultimately worked to the advantage of the British. There was no overarching plan or coordinated conspiracy, despite the circulation of chapatis across villages, which carried ambiguous and confusing messages. Critics therefore argue that the revolt was largely reactive, with no clear vision to establish an alternative system to replace the British Raj. As Thomas Metcalf observed, the rebel leaders themselves were deeply divided; some looked to Bahadur Shah Zafar for authority, while others supported regional rulers. According to him, even if they had managed to win, these leaders were so fragmented that they would likely have turned against one another rather than governing together.

Several historians in recent decades have strongly challenged the earlier consensus. While it is true that the rebels of 1857 did not share a sense of Indian nationhood in the modern sense, their actions cannot be dismissed as entirely isolated. Peasant uprisings were still shaped by local boundaries. However, unlike earlier revolts, there was now a stronger degree of interconnection across regions. Rebels were willing to respond to developments beyond their immediate *ilaqa* (locality). There were channels of communication

linking different parts of north and central India. Rumours too played a powerful role, creating an invisible sense of unity among the insurgents. What bound them together above all was a shared hostility toward the colonial power and the disruptions it caused in their daily lives. Anything symbolising the authority of the Company became a target, and across communities, there was a widespread fear that their caste and religion were under threat.

Much like the sepoys of Jhansi, rebels across the country rose in defence of their *deen* (faith) and *dharam* (religion), seeking to restore a moral order they felt had been corrupted by foreign domination. As historian Gautam Bhadra notes, it was the rebels' daily encounters with the authority of an alien state in their immediate surroundings that shaped their actions. Though separated by distance and shaped by diverse local experiences, they found themselves united against a common enemy at a critical moment in history. As Ranajit Guha observes, they took up arms to reclaim what they believed to be their ancestral domains.

In his latest work, C.A. Bayly interprets the 1857 uprising as "a set of patriotic revolts." According to him, what the rebels sought was the revival of the Indo-Mughal order, an arrangement rooted in Mughal legitimacy, sustained by mutual respect, and balanced between lands and communities. As the revolt unfolded, even among those regarded as collaborators, there was no wholehearted embrace of British authority. The Calcutta intelligentsia, for instance, outwardly declared their loyalty, yet they were not free from inner conflict. As the *Hindoo Patriot* pointed out, they too suffered from the "grievances inseparable from subjection to foreign rule."

Another major question surrounding the nature of the 1857 uprising is whether it should be seen as an elitist movement.



Historians such as Judith Brown argue that feudal elites played a decisive role, suggesting that the course of the revolt often depended on whether powerful magnates chose to support or oppose British rule, as only they could provide broad direction. Eric Stokes even concluded that the rural revolts of 1857 were essentially elitist in character. This interpretation, however, tends to downplay the agency of the masses.

In reality, many feudal lords were hesitant to lead and were often compelled by the rebels to take up leadership roles. Bahadur Shah, for example, was caught off guard when the sepoys approached him and agreed to lead only after much hesitation. In Kanpur, Nana Sahib was forced to join when, according to Tantia Tope's later confession, the sepoys threatened him with severe consequences if he refused. Similarly, the Rani of Jhansi was reportedly threatened with death if she sided with the British instead of supporting the rebels. These instances show that the initiative and momentum of the revolt did not rest solely with the feudal elite but emerged from broader popular action.

2.3.2.1 Planned or Unplanned

Historians still debate whether the Revolt of 1857 erupted suddenly or grew out of a hidden, well-planned network. One difficulty in understanding this lies in the sources; almost everything we know comes from British accounts. The rebels themselves left behind virtually no written evidence. Since their activities were illegal and carried out in secrecy, they likely avoided keeping records. Their defeat only deepened this silence, as their own narratives disappeared with them. For many years after the uprising, the British also discouraged any sympathetic discussion of the revolt and punished those who attempted to present the rebels' perspective.

Some scholars argue that the uprising was not random at all but coordinated through a large underground movement. They refer to the mysterious circulation of chapattis and red lotuses, and the messages supposedly spread by wandering sanyasis, faqirs, and performers. According to this view, many Indian regiments were secretly connected, with 31 May 1857 chosen as the common date to begin the rebellion. Nana Sahib and Maulavi Ahmad Shah of Faizabad are often cited as important figures in this alleged network.

Others strongly disagree, claiming that there is no solid proof of such planning. No documents, letters, or testimonies have ever been found that confirm an organised conspiracy. The truth most likely falls between these two positions. There may indeed have been attempts to coordinate a revolt, but the planning was incomplete and not fully ready when events unexpectedly spiralled out of control. The uprising broke out on 10 May 1857 in Meerut, just outside Delhi, and then spread with extraordinary speed. Within a short time, it swept across a vast region, from the Punjab in the north to the Narmada valley in the south, and from Bihar in the east to Rajputana in the west.

2.3.2.2 Sepoy Mutiny

The living and working conditions in the English East India Company's army gradually began to clash with the religious beliefs and customs of the sepoys, most of whom came from upper-caste Hindu communities in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh. In the early years, the British administration tried to respect these customs and allowed the soldiers to follow their caste rules and religious practices. However, as the army expanded its operations across India and even to overseas territories, it became increasingly difficult to maintain these arrangements. Strict

caste divisions and separate living spaces within the same regiment also made it hard to build unity among soldiers. As a quick solution, the administration first tried to reduce the recruitment of Brahmins, but this strategy did not work. By the mid-nineteenth century, upper-caste soldiers still formed the majority in forces like the Bengal Army.

The first clear sign of sepoy discontent appeared in 1824 when the 47th Regiment at Barrackpur was ordered to serve in Burma. For many Hindu soldiers, crossing the sea meant losing their caste status, so they refused to go. The British reacted harshly; the regiment was dissolved, and the leaders of the protest were executed.

The sepoys who fought in the Afghan War faced even deeper religious difficulties. The harsh conditions of the campaign forced them to abandon caste rules about food and water in order to survive. When they finally returned home, their families and communities realised that the soldiers could not possibly have followed caste norms during the war. As a result, many were unwilling to accept them back into their *biradiri* (caste circle).

Rumours that the Government was secretly trying to convert Indians to Christianity made the sepoys even more uneasy. The close cooperation between officials and Christian missionaries seemed to confirm these suspicions. In several cantonments, missionaries were allowed to preach openly, and their harsh criticism of other religions angered the soldiers. Matters worsened when reports spread that bone dust was being mixed into the *atta* and when the new Enfield rifle was introduced. Its cartridges had to be bitten open, and it was widely believed that the grease used on them contained beef and pig fat. The army authorities made no serious effort to address these concerns, leaving the sepoys convinced that their faith was under threat.

Their dissatisfaction, however, was not only about religion. They were also unhappy with their pay and other allowances, which added to their growing resentment against the Government. An infantry sepoy earned only seven rupees a month. A cavalry *sawar* received 27 rupees, but from that amount, he had to cover the cost of his uniform, food, and the care of his horse. In the end, he was left with barely one or two rupees for himself. What made matters worse was the constant reminder that he was far worse off than his British counterparts. At every stage, he was treated as inferior racially, socially, and in terms of promotion or privileges.

2.3.2.3 Civilian Uprising

Because of the close connection between lives and the condition of the people, the sepoys' mutiny was not just a military revolt; it became a political act. Their interests were closely tied to those of the general population. As the sepoys rose in rebellion, civilians also joined the uprising, especially in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, the main recruiting grounds of the Bengal Army. Except for places like Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur, civil unrest followed the sepoy revolt almost everywhere.

Once the authority of the British troops was shaken, people in the countryside lost their fear of the colonial administration. Years of pent-up grievances burst forth, and large sections of the population rose together against British rule. Government buildings were attacked, treasuries looted, magazines ransacked, barracks and courthouses burned, and prisoners released. The civilian rebellion drew support from a wide range of social groups, landed chiefs, peasants, artisans, religious mendicants and priests, government employees, shopkeepers, boatmen, and many others. In this way, the sepoy revolt quickly grew into a broad popular uprising.



The widespread unrest of this period can be traced to the nature of British rule, which harmed nearly every section of Indian society. Peasants suffered the most; crushed by heavy taxes, many fell into deep debt and poverty. The Company's only priority was to extract as much revenue as possible with the least effort. As a result, land settlements were often rushed through without any understanding of the land's actual capacity.

2.3.3 Decline of the Revolt

The uprising was crushed with extreme violence. Lord Canning assembled British forces in Calcutta and dispatched them to retake Delhi. On 20 September 1857, the city fell back into British hands, Bahadur Shah Zafar was captured, and later exiled. Yet, this did not mark the immediate end of resistance. Cities like Banaras, Allahabad, and Kanpur were gradually subdued, as rebels fought fiercely over every stretch of land, while the British responded with a ruthless campaign of terror across the countryside. The arrival of reinforcements from Britain in Calcutta in October shifted the balance decisively in favour of the colonial power. Over the course of 1858 and into early 1859, British troops systematically regained control of Gwalior, the Doab, Lucknow, the rest of Awadh, Rohilkhand, and central India.

Colonial writers often explained the defeat of the sepoys and village fighters by glorifying British bravery, discipline, and leadership. In their accounts, the rebels appeared scattered, unorganised, and unable to act cohesively. Early Indian historians, influenced by these narratives, sometimes repeated the same explanations.

Modern scholarship, however, offers a very different understanding. Historians now point out that the British succeeded mainly because they poured enormous military strength and financial resources

into the war, far more than the rebels could muster. Most rural participants, fighting like a peasant militia, had little training and were equipped with traditional weapons. They were confronting a colonial army armed with modern firearms, supported by a centralised administration, and connected through an efficient communication network.

Eric Stokes and others have also noted another limitation: the sepoys' tendency to gather around Delhi, which prevented the movement from gaining wider territorial momentum. Once Delhi and Lucknow had been retaken by the British in early 1858, the backbone of the revolt was effectively shattered. The fact that the uprising was largely regional in nature made it easier for the British to crush the resistance area by area. By the beginning of 1859, the revolt had been completely put down.

A major source of strength for the Revolt of 1857 came from the remarkable unity shown by Hindus and Muslims. Soldiers, common people, and leaders worked together with a sense of shared purpose. All the rebels, regardless of religion, accepted Bahadur Shah Zafar, a Muslim ruler, as their Emperor. In fact, the very first instinct of the Hindu sepoys at Meerut was to head straight for Delhi and rally around him.

During the uprising, both communities showed deep respect for each other's beliefs. In places where the rebels gained control, one of the earliest orders issued was a ban on cow slaughter, reflecting sensitivity towards Hindu feelings. At the same time, Muslims participated equally in leadership roles, showing that the revolt drew strength from both sides.

Even British officials later admitted this unity; Aitchison, a high-ranking officer, complained that unlike earlier times, the British were unable to set Hindus and

Muslims against each other. This itself reveals how, before 1858, Indian society and politics were not fundamentally divided along communal lines.

The uprising's fiercest centres of activity emerged in Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Bareilly, Jhansi, and Arrah in Bihar—regions that became symbols of this shared struggle. In Delhi, Bahadur Shah Zafar served mainly as a symbolic figurehead, while the real control of the rebellion rested with a council of soldiers led by General Bakht Khan, who had brought the Bareilly troops to Delhi after joining the uprising. Interestingly, before the revolt, he had only been a subedar in the British artillery; yet, during the rebellion, he emerged as a strong representative of the ordinary soldiers and common people.

When Delhi fell to the British in September 1857, Bakht Khan did not give up. He moved to Lucknow and continued the struggle, fighting until he was killed in battle on 13 May 1859. Bahadur Shah, on the other hand, proved to be one of the weakest parts of the leadership. His commitment to the revolt was never firm, and he did not truly connect with the sepoys, who themselves were suspicious of him. He disliked the growing influence of the sepoy leaders and constantly wavered, torn between wanting to rule as Emperor and wanting to protect himself if the rebellion failed. His authority was further weakened by court politics, especially the intrigues of his favourite queen, Zeenat Mahal, and his sons, who maintained secret contacts with the British. His age, indecisiveness, and lack of strong leadership created serious problems at the very heart of the movement and ultimately caused immense harm to the revolt's overall direction.

In Kanpur, the leadership of the uprising fell to Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the last Peshwa, Baji Rao II. With the support of the rebel sepoys, he succeeded in driving the British out of the city and declared himself the

new Peshwa. Yet, he also recognised Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of India and announced that he would serve as his Governor.

Much of the actual fighting for Nana Sahib was carried out by his most devoted companion, Tantia Tope. Tantia Tope earned lasting admiration for his unwavering loyalty, bold resistance, and masterful use of guerrilla tactics. Another close associate, Azimullah, played a key role as a strategist and propagandist, helping to shape the political messaging of the revolt. However, Nana Sahib's reputation suffered a serious stain when the British garrison at Kanpur was massacred, despite his earlier promise to grant them safe passage. This act cast a shadow over his otherwise courageous role in the rebellion.

In Lucknow, the revolt was spearheaded by the Begum of Awadh, who declared her young son, Birjis Qadr, the rightful Nawab of the region. With strong support from the rebel sepoys, as well as the zamindars and peasants of Awadh, she launched a determined and well-coordinated offensive against the British. Forced out of the city, the British troops retreated into the Residency and fortified themselves there. Although the rebels laid a long and intense siege, their efforts ultimately failed. The small British garrison held out with remarkable resilience and courage, managing to withstand the sustained attacks until help arrived.

Among the towering figures of the Revolt of 1857, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi stands out as one of India's greatest heroines. She entered the uprising after the British rejected her right to adopt an heir, seized Jhansi, and even hinted that she had encouraged the sepoy mutiny in her own city. For a while, she hesitated, unsure of the path ahead. But once she committed herself, she fought with extraordinary courage and determination.

Stories of her bravery, leadership, and military skill have inspired generations. After



a fierce and desperate battle in Jhansi, where even women were seen operating cannons and supplying ammunition, she was eventually forced to retreat. Yet, the Rani remained resolute. She urged her followers to swear that they would never allow their dream of *Azadshahi*, or self-rule, to be buried by their own hands. With the support of Tantia Tope and her loyal Afghan guards, Rani Lakshmibai succeeded in capturing Gwalior. Maharaja Sindhia, who had remained faithful to the British, attempted to oppose her, but most of his soldiers abandoned him and joined the Rani instead. Defeated and isolated, Sindhia fled to Agra to seek British protection. Rani Lakshmibai met her end on 17 June 1858, fighting fearlessly on horseback and dressed as a soldier. By her side fell her closest companion, a Muslim girl who had stayed with her throughout the struggle, symbolising once again the unity that marked the revolt.

In Bihar, Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur emerged as another remarkable leader. A discontented zamindar whose fortunes had declined, he was nearly eighty years old when the uprising began, yet he proved to be one of its finest military commanders. After battling the British in Bihar, he moved west to join Nana Sahib's forces and fought in Awadh and Central India. On his return to Bihar, he defeated the British near Arrah, but the victory was his last. He had been grievously wounded and died on 27 April 1858 in his ancestral home at Jagdishpur.

Another prominent figure was Maulavi Ahmadullah of Faizabad. Originally from Madras, he had long been advocating armed resistance against the British. In early 1857, he travelled north to Faizabad and engaged in a major battle with British troops sent to silence him. When the revolt broke out in May, he quickly rose to prominence as a leading figure in Awadh. After the fall of Lucknow, he continued the resistance in Rohilkhand until he was betrayed and

killed by the Raja of Puwain, who received a reward from the British for his treachery. Even British historians have acknowledged Maulavi Ahmadullah's courage, patriotism, and impressive military skill.

Still, the true backbone of the Revolt of 1857 was the sepoys themselves. Countless soldiers showed remarkable bravery on the battlefield, and thousands gave their lives without hesitation. Their courage and willingness to sacrifice everything brought them closer than anyone else to driving the British out of India. What is even more striking is that, in the heat of the struggle, they rose above the very religious concerns that had initially sparked the rebellion. Though the revolt began over the issue of greased cartridges, the sepoys later used those same cartridges freely, placing the cause of freedom above personal beliefs.

Despite its wide reach and popular support across large parts of North India, the revolt did not spread to the whole country or unite every section of society. Many princely rulers and powerful zamindars, motivated by self-interest and intimidated by British power, chose to remain loyal to the colonial government. Some even actively assisted the British. Among those who supported the British were the Sindhia of Gwalior, the Holkar of Indore, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the ruler of Jodhpur, several other Rajput chiefs, the Nawab of Bhopal, and the rulers of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Kashmir, and Nepal, along with many wealthy landholders.

In the end, only a tiny fraction, barely one percent, of the Indian princes and chiefs joined the uprising, limiting the revolt's strength despite the deep commitment of its ordinary fighters. In reality, hardly one percent of India's princely chiefs took part in the uprising. Governor-General Canning later observed that these rulers acted like "breakwaters," preventing the rebellion from turning into a massive wave that might have

swept the British out of the country altogether.

Large regions such as Madras, Bombay, Bengal, and western Punjab remained quiet, even though the general mood among the people there was sympathetic to the rebels. At the same time, most members of the middle and upper classes viewed the revolt with suspicion or outright disapproval. Only the dispossessed and unhappy zamindars supported it wholeheartedly; wealthy and influential groups either stayed aloof or sided with the British.

Even in Awadh, many taluqdars who initially joined the uprising withdrew their support once the British promised to restore their estates. This sudden shift made it extremely difficult for local peasants and soldiers to maintain a long-term guerrilla struggle. Moneylenders became prime targets for villagers during the revolt, leading them to naturally oppose the rebellion. Over time, many merchants also began to distance themselves. The rebels, desperate for funds and food, imposed heavy taxes on traders or seized their grain supplies to feed their troops. As a result, merchants often hid their wealth and refused to help.

The Bengal zamindars also remained loyal to the colonial government; after all, their privileged position had been created by British policies. The unrest among peasants in Bihar further alarmed them, pushing them even closer to the British. Likewise, the major trading communities in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras supported the British because their profits depended heavily on international trade and economic ties with British business interests.

India's emerging educated class also kept its distance from the Revolt. Many were uncomfortable with the rebels' reliance on religious appeals and their resistance to certain social reforms. These educated Indians genuinely wanted to pull the country out of backwardness and wrongly assumed

that British rule would help modernise India, while the rebels would push it further behind. Only in the years that followed did they realise through experience that a foreign power had no real interest in modernising India; instead, British rule drained the country's wealth and kept it underdeveloped.

The disunity among Indians during the revolt proved disastrous, and this was only one of the many weaknesses that crippled the uprising. The rebels lacked modern arms and ammunition; many had to fight with old-fashioned weapons like swords and pikes. Organisation was another major problem. Though the sepoys fought bravely and selflessly, they often lacked discipline and sometimes acted more like an uncoordinated crowd than a structured army. There was no unified command, no shared strategy, and no central leadership to tie the scattered uprisings together.

The different centres of revolt acted independently. Leaders were united only by a shared hatred of foreign rule, not by a common plan for what should replace it. Once they pushed the British out of an area, they had no clear vision of the new order that should be established. Internal distrust made matters worse. Leaders frequently clashed and undermined one another: the Begum of Awadh argued with Maulavi Ahmadullah, the Mughal princes had tensions with the sepoy generals, and Azimullah even advised Nana Sahib not to visit Delhi for fear that Bahadur Shah would overshadow him. These rivalries, personal ambitions, and narrow loyalties weakened the movement from within and prevented the revolt from becoming a united and lasting force.

The lack of unity among Indians in 1857 was, in many ways, natural. Modern nationalism had not yet taken root. People's loyalties usually extended only to their village, region, or at most their kingdom. The idea of a shared Indian identity and common



national interests had not yet developed. Ironically, the Revolt of 1857 helped change this. By bringing together people from different regions and communities in a single struggle, it planted the early seeds of a sense of belonging to one nation, an idea that would grow stronger in the years that followed.

2.3.4 Reasons for the Failure of the Revolt

When the sepoys reached Delhi from Meerut, Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II appeared to have been caught off guard. His first reaction was to inform the Lieutenant-Governor in Agra about what had happened. Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi responded in a similar way at first; she reported the situation to the British and only later, after some hesitation, openly joined the uprising. As for Nana Saheb or Maulvi Ahmad Shah of Faizabad, it is still unclear whether they had established prior contacts with different military stations or played any direct role in sparking the rebellion. The much-talked-about circulation of chapattis and lotus flowers also remains a mystery, with no definite explanation of their meaning. What is certain, however, is that within a month of the outbreak at Meerut, the revolt had spread rapidly across northern India.

Even though there may not have been any pre-planned organisation before the rebellion began, the rebels quickly felt the need to create some form of structure once events were underway. After the capture of Delhi, letters were sent to neighbouring rulers, including those in Rajasthan, seeking their support and urging them to join the cause.

Rebel leaders everywhere acknowledged Bahadur Shah as their Emperor; coins were minted and orders issued in his name. In Bareilly, Khan Bahadur Khan administered on behalf of the Mughal ruler. It is striking

that regardless of where the revolt began, Meerut, Kanpur, or Jhansi, the rebels' first instinct was always to move towards Delhi. They clearly recognised the need to create a central authority to consolidate their gains. However, with the British launching a strong counter-offensive, they never had the opportunity to turn these early, fragile efforts into a stable political structure.

For over a year, the rebels continued their fight despite overwhelming challenges. They lacked a steady supply of weapons, and the limited ammunition seized from British depots was quickly exhausted. In many battles, they were forced to confront a well-armed enemy with little more than swords, spears, or outdated guns. Communication was another major weakness. Without an efficient means to send messages or coordinate movements, rebel groups often had no idea what others were facing, what support they needed, or where they were positioned. As a result, each group ended up fighting its own isolated battle, unable to assist one another in moments of crisis.

Although ordinary people generally sympathised with the uprising, the larger society did not rally behind it. Influential groups such as merchants, educated elites, and several Indian rulers kept their distance or openly sided with the British. In cities like Calcutta and Bombay, public meetings were even organised to pray for British victory. Many princes, despite having suffered from the Doctrine of Lapse, still believed their best future lay with the British and readily supplied them with troops and resources. The sepoys' struggle would have been significantly stronger had these rulers chosen to support the rebellion. In fact, almost half of the Indian soldiers serving the Company did not rebel; many actively fought alongside the British. Delhi, for example, was retaken by a force in which Indian soldiers outnumbered the British. Even the famous explosion at the Kashmere Gate was carried

out by a mixed group of British and Indian soldiers, including Punjabis and men from Agra and Oudh.

Leadership was another major weakness. Except for remarkable figures like Rani Lakshmibai, Kunwar Singh, and Maulvi Ahmadullah, most rebel leaders failed to grasp the magnitude of the movement. Many were mainly concerned with protecting their personal power or estates. Bahadur Shah II and Zeenat Mahal, distrusting the sepoys, even attempted to negotiate with the British in hopes of saving themselves. Several taluqdars shifted loyalties more than once, backing whichever side seemed stronger at the moment. Beyond a shared resentment of foreign rule, the rebels lacked a unified vision for the future or any coherent political programme. Their aims were rooted in restoring old privileges, rather than in imagining a new order. This lack of direction and capable leadership greatly weakened the uprising. As John Lawrence observed, if even one truly able leader had emerged among them, the British might well have been defeated.

2.3.5 End of the Revolt

A major setback came when Delhi fell to the British on 20 September 1857, after weeks of fierce and bloody fighting. Bahadur Shah Zafar, already old and frail, was taken prisoner. His sons were captured and killed on the spot. The emperor himself was later exiled to Rangoon, where he died in 1862, grieving the loss of his kingdom and the loneliness of dying far from the city he loved. With his exile, the Mughal dynasty came to a final and absolute end. The collapse of

Delhi also robbed the revolt of its symbolic centre.

Elsewhere, the struggle continued, but the British launched a relentless campaign under commanders like John Lawrence, Outram, Havelock, Neil, Campbell, and Hugh Rose. One after another, the key leaders of the uprising fell. Nana Sahib was defeated at Kanpur; refusing to surrender, he fled to Nepal in early 1859 and vanished from history. Tantia Tope fought a brilliant guerilla war across Central India until he was betrayed by a zamindar friend and captured in his sleep; he was executed on 15 April 1859. Rani Lakshmibai had already died fighting on 17 June 1858.

By 1859, Kunwar Singh, Bakht Khan, Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareilly, Rao Sahib, and Maulavi Ahmadullah had all been killed. The Begum of Awadh, unable to continue the struggle, took refuge in Nepal. By the end of that year, British power had been fully restored across India.

Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi was killed in battle on 17 June 1858. Her adversary, General Hugh Rose, famously honoured her by stating that she was “the only man among the rebels.” With these losses, the most powerful challenge the British had ever faced in India came to an end. Historians still wonder how events might have unfolded had the rebels succeeded: would they have restored older feudal structures, or taken the country in a different direction? Whatever the possibilities, one thing is clear: despite their shortcomings, the rebels’ attempt to free India from foreign domination was both patriotic and forward-looking.

Recap

- ◆ Historians continue to debate whether the Revolt of 1857 was a sudden outbreak or the result of incomplete and poorly documented planning, as most surviving sources are British accounts.
- ◆ The revolt began on 10 May 1857 at Meerut and spread with extraordinary speed across large parts of northern and central India.
- ◆ Delhi became the symbolic centre of the revolt after Bahadur Shah II was proclaimed Emperor, giving the uprising a wider political character.
- ◆ The revolt spread rapidly through Awadh, Rohilkhand, Bundelkhand, Bihar, Central India, Rajasthan, and parts of Punjab, involving both sepoys and civilians.
- ◆ Leadership of the revolt emerged locally, with figures like Nana Sahib, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Kunwar Singh, Rani Lakshmibai, Tantia Tope, Bakht Khan, and Maulavi Ahmadullah playing key roles.
- ◆ The fall of Delhi in September 1857 marked a major turning point, depriving the revolt of its symbolic centre.
- ◆ Despite its defeat, the Revolt of 1857 planted early seeds of Indian national consciousness.
- ◆ The revolt lacked prior planning, coordination, and unified leadership.
- ◆ Delhi became the symbolic centre under Bahadur Shah II, but authority remained weak.
- ◆ Rebels suffered from shortages of arms, poor communication, and internal divisions.
- ◆ Many Indian rulers, elites, and soldiers remained loyal to the British.
- ◆ Leadership failures and backward-looking aims weakened the movement.
- ◆ British forces gradually crushed resistance region by region.
- ◆ Delhi fell on 20 September 1857, ending the revolt's unity.
- ◆ Rani Lakshmibai, Kunwar Singh, and Tantia Tope fought bravely but were defeated.

Objective Questions

1. Where and when did the Revolt of 1857 actually begin?
2. Who was declared the Emperor after the capture of Delhi?
3. Who led the revolt in Kanpur?
4. Who was the prominent leader of the revolt in Bihar?
5. Who led the uprising in Lucknow?
6. Which soldiers were punished for refusing greased cartridges at Meerut?
7. Who assisted Nana Sahib militarily?
8. Who led the revolt in Bareilly?
9. What event marked the symbolic end of the revolt?
10. How did Karl Marx interpret the Revolt of 1857?
11. When was Delhi captured by the British?
12. Who continued guerrilla warfare until 1859?
13. What weapons did the Santhals use?
14. Who issued the decree in 1856 concerning Mughal titles?

Answers

1. At Meerut on 10 May 1857
2. Bahadur Shah II
3. Nana Sahib
4. Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur
5. Begum Hazrat Mahal
6. Soldiers of the 3rd Native Cavalry

7. Tantia Tope
8. Khan Bahadur Khan
9. The fall of Delhi in September 1857
10. As a national uprising rather than a mutiny.
11. 20 September 1857
12. Tantia Tope
13. Axes and bows
14. Lord Canning

Assignments

1. Assess the contribution of Nana Sahib and Tantia Tope in organising the revolt in Kanpur.
2. Examine the participation of peasants, artisans, and zamindars in the revolt.
3. Discuss the role of Begum Hazrat Mahal in leading the resistance in Awadh.
4. How did regional leaders shape the progress of the revolt in different parts of India?
5. What were the limitations of the revolt in terms of unity and planning?

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UNIT

Impact of the Revolt

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the major political changes introduced by the British after 1857, including the end of Company rule and the beginning of direct Crown rule
- ◆ describe how the British reorganised the army to prevent future uprisings and how this affected Indian soldiers
- ◆ analyse the changes in administrative policies, such as the exclusion of Indians from higher posts and the tightening of British control
- ◆ discuss the shift in British attitude towards the princely states, including the policy of non-annexation and the role of princes as supporters of British rule

Prerequisite

The Revolt of 1857 forced the British to rethink their policies and assumptions regarding loyalty, governance, and control. It marked the end of the East India Company's rule and brought India directly under the British Crown, introducing new administrative systems and stricter military policies. The relationship between the British and Indians also transformed, with deeper racial barriers and increased surveillance shaping everyday interactions. At the same time, the revolt ignited a new sense of nationalism among Indians. The memory of the uprising, its sacrifices, its leaders, and its spirit of defiance became a powerful inspiration for later freedom movements.

Historians interpret the impact of the revolt differently. Some emphasise the political reorganisation that followed, while others focus on the social and psychological consequences. Nationalist historians highlight how the revolt planted the early seeds of India's independence struggle, shaping the mindset of future generations.

Keywords

Victorian liberalism, Queen's Proclamation, Imperial Legislative Council, Indianisation

Discussion

2.4.1 Queen's Proclamation

The Revolt of 1857 marked a major turning point in Indian history. One of its most significant outcomes was the end of the East India Company's rule. Even before peace had been fully restored, the British Parliament passed the Act for the Better Government of India on 2 August 1858, which transferred authority directly to the Crown. Under this Act, Queen Victoria became the sovereign of British India, and a Secretary of State for India, sitting in the British cabinet, was appointed to oversee Indian affairs.

The Act came into force on 1 November 1858, when the Queen issued her famous Proclamation. It promised religious tolerance and pledged to govern Indians in accordance with their own traditions and customs. As Bernard Cohn has explained, this shift symbolised a deeper transformation: the British, who had once ruled as external conquerors, were now positioning themselves as legitimate "insiders" by vesting sovereignty in their monarch.

The Queen's Proclamation laid out how the monarch, her officials in India, the Indian princes, and ordinary subjects would be placed within a carefully structured imperial hierarchy. However, beyond this formal arrangement, the revolt and its brutal suppression left deep scars. The sepoys were accused of betraying their trust, and this suspicion quickly extended to Indians in general, both in Britain and within India itself. Reports of alleged sepoy atrocities sparked demands for harsh punishment and

vengeance. When Lord Canning, the Viceroy, attempted to temper these passions with moderation, his critics back home mocked him as "Clemency Canning" and even petitioned the Queen to recall him.

2.4.1.1 Administrative Changes

The Revolt of 1857 shook the British administration so deeply that it forced them to rethink how India was being governed. In the years that followed, major changes took place not just in the political setup but also in Indian society and the economy. In 1858, the British Parliament passed a law that ended the rule of the East India Company and brought India directly under the control of the British Crown. Until then, the Company's Directors and the Board of Control made decisions for India. After the Act, this authority shifted to a newly created position, the Secretary of State for India.

This Secretary of State was a member of the British Cabinet, which meant he had to answer to the British Parliament. So, even though India was far away, real power continued to rest with Parliament in London. To assist the Secretary of State, an India Council was established. The Council could offer advice, but the Secretary of State had the right to reject it. Only in financial matters was he required to obtain the Council's approval.

By 1869, the India Council had lost much of its independence and was functioning almost entirely under the control of the Secretary of State. Most of its members



were retired officials who had previously served in India, so the body was more of an advisory group than an authority in its own right.

According to the 1858 Act, the day-to-day administration of India continued to be handled by the Governor-General, who also carried the title of Viceroy, the Crown's direct representative in India. His position was prestigious and well-paid; he received a salary of two and a half lakh rupees a year, along with several additional allowances. However, over time, the Viceroy's real power gradually diminished. When it came to shaping policies or implementing them, the British Government in London increasingly dictated the terms. This was not entirely new. Ever since the Regulating Act, Pitt's India Act, and the various Charter Acts, control of Indian affairs had been steadily shifting to Britain. Although the East India Company had originally conquered India to further its own commercial interests, the country eventually came to be administered mainly to serve the needs of powerful groups within British society.

The India Act of 1858 pushed this centralisation of power even further. Earlier, despite London's formal authority, the Governor-General in India still handled many key decisions independently. Messages from Britain took weeks to reach India, and urgent matters could not wait. As a result, London usually reacted to decisions that had already been made rather than guiding them in advance. In effect, British authorities oversaw Indian governance from afar but did not directly manage every detail.

This changed dramatically by 1870. With the laying of the submarine telegraph cable through the Red Sea, communication between India and Britain became almost immediate. Orders that once took weeks now arrived within hours. The Secretary of State in London could interfere in even

the smallest administrative matters, and he could do so continuously. Real power over India thus became firmly concentrated in London, far from the land being governed.

Indians had no representation in the India Council, the British Cabinet, or in Parliament. They had virtually no channel through which to express their concerns or influence policy. As a result, Indian opinions carried even less weight than before. Meanwhile, British industrialists, traders, and financiers gained greater sway over Indian affairs. Their growing influence made the administration more conservative and rigid, and after 1858, even the outward appearance of liberal reform was slowly abandoned.

In India, the Act of 1858 introduced an Executive Council to assist the Governor-General. Each member of this Council headed a specific department and served as an official adviser, much like ministers in a cabinet. The Council began with five members, and by 1918 it had expanded to six regular members, besides the Commander-in-Chief, who was in charge of military affairs. Although the Council discussed major issues and made decisions by majority vote, the Governor-General could overrule any decision he disagreed with. Over time, this meant that real power became concentrated almost entirely in his hands.

A significant development came with the Indian Councils Act of 1861. This act expanded the Governor-General's Council for lawmaking purposes and gave it a new name: the Imperial Legislative Council. The Governor-General could now appoint between six and twelve additional members, with at least half of them being non-officials, either Indian or British.

However, despite these additions, the Imperial Legislative Council should not be mistaken for an early version of a true parliament. It had very limited authority. It

could not debate major proposals without government approval, and financial matters were completely off-limits. The Council had no say over the budget, no power to question administrative actions, and no ability to hold the executive accountable. Even when it passed a bill, the measure did not become law unless the Governor-General approved it; furthermore, the Secretary of State in London could still cancel it afterwards. In reality, the Legislative Council existed mainly to endorse government decisions and to make them appear as though they had been approved through a legislative process, even though its role was almost entirely symbolic.

The Indian members who joined the Legislative Council were very few, and none of them were chosen by the people. They were handpicked by the Governor-General, who typically selected princes, their advisers, wealthy zamindars, prominent merchants, or retired high-ranking officials. These men represented elite interests, not the broader Indian population or the rising tide of nationalist sentiment.

As a result, Indians remained completely outside the actual decision-making process. Governance continued to be authoritarian and distant, just as it had been before 1858. This wasn't a mistake or a temporary arrangement; it was a deliberate strategy. Charles Wood, the Secretary of State for India, made this clear when he introduced the Indian Councils Bill of 1861. He openly stated that when one race rules over another, even the gentlest form of government ends up being a kind of despotism.

2.4.1.2 Provincial Administration

For administrative ease, the British divided India into several provinces. Among these, Bengal, Madras, and Bombay were the most prominent and were known as

the Presidencies. Each Presidency was governed by a Governor and a small Executive Council of three members, all appointed directly by the British Crown. These Presidency governments enjoyed far greater authority than the other provinces, which were run by Lieutenant Governors or Chief Commissioners appointed by the Governor-General.

Before 1833, provincial governments had considerable independence. However, after that year, their ability to make laws was taken away, and their spending was tightly supervised by the central government. This strict central control soon proved impractical. Given India's vast size and diversity, running everything from the top created delays, inefficiency, and widespread dissatisfaction.

The Indian Councils Act of 1861 marked a shift away from rigid centralisation. It called for the creation of provincial legislative councils in Bengal, Bombay, and Madras, with similar bodies to follow in other provinces. However, these councils were only advisory in nature. They included officials along with a small number, usually four to eight, of non-official members, both Indian and British. Despite their presence, these bodies had no real authority and certainly did not function like representative or democratic institutions.

Centralisation was most harmful in financial matters. Revenue collected from every corner of India, regardless of the source, was channelled to the central government in Calcutta. From there, funds were redistributed to the provinces. This system made the provinces heavily dependent on the centre and left them with little freedom to plan or respond to local needs.

The Central Government kept an extremely tight grip on how every province spent its money, right down to the smallest expense. However, this rigid system created more problems than it solved. In reality, the



were assigned wholly to the provinces, and others were shared between the two. These financial arrangements were to be reviewed every five years. Despite these reforms, the changes did not signal the arrival of genuine provincial autonomy, nor did they offer Indians any meaningful role in running their provinces.

Recognising these inefficiencies, the British administration eventually decided that financial decentralisation was necessary. The first major move in this direction came in 1870 under Lord Mayo. His reforms separated some financial responsibilities between the two levels of government. Provinces were given fixed grants from central revenues to manage specific areas such as policing, prisons, education, health services, and road construction. Within these grants, provincial administrations were free to allocate more or less to any department as they saw fit, provided they stayed within the overall budget.

Lord Mayo's financial reforms were expanded in 1877 by Lord Lytton, who shifted additional areas of expenditure, such as land revenue, excise, general administration, and the justice system, to provincial responsibility. To help provinces meet these new costs, they were granted a fixed percentage of the income generated within their boundaries from sources like stamp duties, excise taxes, and income tax.

Another round of changes came in 1882 under Viceroy Lord Ripon. The earlier system of giving provinces fixed grants was abolished. Instead, provinces were allowed to retain all the revenue they collected from certain sources and received a predetermined share from others. This created a threefold classification of revenue: some belonged entirely to the central government, some

Mounting financial pressures pushed the British Government in India to delegate administrative responsibilities downward by encouraging the growth of local bodies such as municipalities and district boards. Meanwhile, the Industrial Revolution had dramatically transformed Europe during the 19th century. As India came into closer contact with Europe and as new forms of imperial control and economic exploitation took shape, the British found it necessary to introduce some of the modern developments seen in the West, whether in public health, education, or urban amenities.

To address the growing financial strain, the British decided to hand over certain local responsibilities, such as education, public health, sanitation, and water supply, to local governing bodies. These bodies would raise their own funds through local taxes. Some British officials also supported this move for political reasons; they believed that if Indians were allowed to participate in small administrative roles, even at the local level, it might keep them from becoming politically restless. Since this participation was limited and carefully controlled, it posed no real threat to British authority.

Local bodies began to be established between 1864 and 1868, but they were “local” only in name. Their members were usually nominated rather than elected, and the District Magistrate, an official of the British Government, acted as the head. These institutions did not function as true organs



of local self-government. Educated Indians saw through this arrangement and viewed these bodies mainly as tools for imposing more taxes on the population rather than as institutions representing community interests.

A slight shift occurred in 1882 when Lord Ripon introduced reforms. Lord Ripon's administration made a cautious but important move towards strengthening local governance. A government resolution announced that rural and urban affairs should increasingly be handled by local boards, with most members being non-officials. These non-official members were to be elected by the people, but only in places where the authorities felt elections could be safely introduced. The resolution even allowed a non-official member to be chosen as the chairperson of a local body.

To put these ideas into practice, the provinces passed their own acts. Yet, in reality, the reforms were very limited. In most municipalities and district boards, elected members remained in the minority. The right to vote was confined to a very small section of the population, making the elections far from representative. District officers continued to head the district boards, although over time some municipalities did come to be chaired by non-officials.

The Government still maintained tight control. It held the power to interfere in the workings of these bodies, suspend them, or dissolve them whenever it wished. As a result, except in major Presidency cities like Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, most local boards operated more as extensions of the government bureaucracy than as independent self-governing institutions.

2.4.1.4 Changes in the Army

After 1858, the British undertook a thorough restructuring of the Indian army. Some changes were simply administrative; since power had shifted from the East

India Company to the British Crown, the Company's European soldiers were absorbed into the regular British forces. However, the deeper purpose behind the reorganisation was to ensure that nothing like the Revolt of 1857 could ever happen again. The British had learned that their rule depended heavily on military strength, and they wanted to eliminate any chance of another uprising.

One of the first steps was to ensure a strong European presence within the army. The ratio of European to Indian soldiers was increased so that Europeans always held a position of dominance: one European to every two Indian soldiers in Bengal, and two Europeans to every five Indians in Madras and Bombay. European troops were also stationed at strategically important locations so that they could respond quickly to any threat.

The most sensitive and powerful sections of the army, such as the artillery and later, in the 20th century, the tank and armoured divisions, were placed entirely under European control. The long-standing policy of keeping Indians out of the officer ranks continued unchanged. All these measures were carefully designed to limit Indian soldiers' ability to organise or rebel, ensuring that control remained firmly in British hands.

Until 1914, Indian soldiers were not allowed to rise beyond the rank of subedar. This strict ceiling on promotion was only one part of a larger strategy the British used to keep the Indian section of the army divided and under control. Their guiding principle was "balance and counterpoise," in other words, a deliberate policy of divide and rule designed to ensure that Indian troops could never unite against British authority.

Recruitment itself was shaped by discrimination. The British classified Indians into so-called "martial" and "non-martial" groups, an idea they essentially invented to justify their policies. Communities from Awadh,



first Indian to pass it in 1863. After him, one or two Indians managed to enter the service each year, but this tiny number made little difference. For most Indians, the ICS remained practically inaccessible.

Several barriers kept Indian candidates out. The exam was held thousands of miles away in London and had to be written in English, a foreign language for most Indians at the time. The syllabus centred on Classical Greek and Latin subjects, which required many years of expensive education in Britain. To make matters worse, the maximum age limit for appearing in the exam was reduced from 23 years in 1859 to just 19 years by 1878, making it even harder for Indians to qualify.

For a young Indian of nineteen, qualifying for the Civil Service was nearly impossible. The situation was no better in other branches of administration. In departments such as the Police, Public Works, Medical Services, Posts and Telegraphs, Forests, Engineering, Customs, and later even the Railways, the top and best-paid positions were reserved almost entirely for the British. This overwhelming presence of Europeans in key posts was deliberate. British officials openly argued that only by keeping authority in European hands could their rule in India be secured.

Although Indian demands eventually forced some steps toward “Indianisation” after 1918, the deeper reality did not change. The most influential and decision-making roles continued to be held by British officers. Indians who did enter the services soon realised that they exercised no real political authority. They were expected to carry out British policies and uphold British interests, not represent the aspirations of their own people.

2.4.2 Relations with the Princely States

The Revolt of 1857 forced the British to rethink the way they dealt with the Indian princely states. Until then, the British had used every possible excuse to annex these kingdoms. However, after the uprising, this aggressive policy was dropped. During the Revolt, most princes had not only stayed loyal to the British but had actively helped them crush the rebellion. Lord Canning, the Viceroy, even described them as “breakwaters in the storm.”

In return for their loyalty, the British promised that the rulers’ right to adopt an heir would be honoured and that their territories would no longer be merged into British India. The events of 1857 made it clear to the British that these states could be reliable partners, especially in times of unrest or when facing any future challenge from the Indian population.

In 1862, Canning announced that the British Crown now stood as the unquestioned supreme authority in all of India. This idea of complete British dominance was reinforced in 1876 when Queen Victoria took on the title “Empress of India.” Later, Lord Curzon openly stated that the Indian princes governed their states only as representatives of the British Crown. The princes accepted this inferior status because it guaranteed their positions and privileges as hereditary rulers.

As the paramount power, the British claimed the authority to oversee how the

princely states were run. They frequently interfered in internal matters through the Residents posted in each state. They appointed and dismissed ministers, controlled major decisions, and sometimes even removed rulers from power. Part of this interference was justified as an attempt to modernise the states so they would function more smoothly alongside British India. The spread of railways, postal services, telegraphs, a uniform currency, and economic links further pushed these states into closer integration.

Another reason for British involvement was the rise of popular, democratic, and nationalist movements within many princely states. The British often helped rulers suppress these movements while simultaneously trying to correct the worst administrative failures to prevent unrest.

The shift in British policy towards the princely states can be seen in the cases of Mysore and Baroda. Mysore had been taken over by Lord Bentinck in 1831 due to alleged misrule. However, after 1868, the British recognised the adopted heir of the previous ruler and restored full control to him in 1881. Baroda, on the other hand, saw its ruler, Malhar Rao Gaekwad, removed in 1874 after being accused of poor governance and even attempting to poison the British Resident. Yet Baroda was not annexed; instead, another member of the Gaekwad family, a young, more acceptable candidate, was placed on the throne.

Recap

- ◆ The Revolt of 1857 marked a decisive turning point by ending the rule of the East India Company and transferring power to the British Crown.



- ◆ The Act for the Better Government of India (1858) placed India directly under Queen Victoria and created the post of Secretary of State for India.
- ◆ The Queen's Proclamation of 1858 promised religious tolerance and governance according to Indian traditions, while symbolically presenting British rule as legitimate and internal.
- ◆ Centralisation of power increased sharply after 1858, with real authority concentrated in London rather than India.
- ◆ The Secretary of State and British Parliament exercised decisive control, while Indians had no representation in governing institutions.
- ◆ After 1857, British policy towards princely states shifted from annexation to indirect control in return for loyalty.
- ◆ The British reinforced their paramountcy over princely states while allowing rulers to retain power under British supervision.
- ◆ These political, administrative, and military changes ultimately strengthened British control but also sowed the seeds of modern Indian nationalism.

Objective Questions

1. Who became the sovereign of British India after 1858?
2. Which Act transferred power from the East India Company to the British Crown?
3. What was the role of the Secretary of State for India?
4. Who introduced the first major financial decentralisation reforms?
5. What proportion of India's revenue was spent on the army in 1904?
6. Who was the first Indian to enter the ICS?
7. What title did the Governor-General hold after 1858?
8. Which body advised the Secretary of State for India?
9. What legislative body was created by the Indian Councils Act of 1861?
10. Which Viceroy reformed local bodies in 1882?

Answers

1. Queen Victoria
2. The Act for the Better Government of India, 1858
3. To oversee Indian affairs from the British Cabinet.
4. Lord Mayo in 1870
5. About 52 per cent
6. Satyendranath Tagore in 1863
7. Viceroy
8. India Council
9. Imperial Legislative Council
10. Lord Ripon

Assignments

1. How did the revolt affect the relationship between the British Crown and Indian princely states?
2. Discuss the impact of the revolt on the Indian army and military policies of the British.
3. Analyse the economic consequences of the revolt for peasants, zamindars, and landlords.
4. What were the changes in British policies toward land revenue and agrarian relations after the revolt?
5. Examine the impact of the revolt on Hindu–Muslim unity and communal relations.

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BLOCK

Socio-Political Consciousness in India



UNIT

Socio-Religious Movements

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify various socio-religious movements in India and their major aims
- ◆ understand the significance of these movements in the Indian freedom struggle
- ◆ discuss the status of the key figures of the movement and their roles
- ◆ examine various caste-based movements in India and their contributions

Prerequisite

The nineteenth century in India was marked by the beginning of a significant socio-religious reform movement that addressed existing inequalities in society. These movements were led by the intellectuals and reformers of the time, who aimed to eradicate social evils such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, and religious orthodoxy. Major leaders include Raja Rammohun Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Jyotiba Phule, Dayanand Saraswati, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, and others who played crucial roles in shaping modern Indian thought.

The major reform movements focused on in this unit include Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Aligarh Movement, Prarthana Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, and the Self-Respect Movement. The significance of these socio-religious movements lies in their emphasis on rationalism, social equality, and the advocacy of *Swadeshi* and self-reliance among the common people.

Keywords

Social reform, Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Aligarh Movement, Self-Respect Movement, Religious reform, Modernisation, Education.

Discussion

The nineteenth century marked a crucial period in modern India, characterised by the rise of intellectuals. These intellectuals worked to eradicate atrocities across religious, social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. They pursued the path of reforming society by challenging the existing demeaning and discriminatory notions of contemporary society. Gradually, the movement gained momentum, marking the beginning of national regeneration.

According to Bipan Chandra, this movement is referred to as the “Renaissance,” which was driven mainly by the emerging middle class and traditional and Western-educated individuals.

The emergence of the reform movement in India can be traced to the efforts of Raja Rammohun Roy, an Indian in Bengal, and the establishment of Brahmo Samaj in 1828. Prominent movements among Indians also include the Paramahansa Mandali and Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra, as well as Arya Samaj in Punjab and North India. Additionally, there are regional caste-based movements like Kayasth Sabha, Sarin Sabha, Satya Shodhak Samaj, and Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, which work to address social and religious issues within specific communities.

Among Indians, Sikhs, and Parsis, the Ahmadiya and Aligarh movements and the Rehnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha played similar roles. Although these movements focused on regional issues and distinct religious consciousness, they shared a

uniform perspective of reformation, reflecting a broader sense of awareness.

The reform movements of the 19th century were not purely religious but were driven by humanist ideals. Their focus was on improving worldly life rather than seeking salvation. Among these reformers were Raja Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda advocated a secular approach to religion, using spirituality to address material realities.

3.1.1. Brahmo Samaj

Raja Rammohun Roy, the father of modern India, initiated the Bengal Renaissance Movement by emphasising monotheism and rationality. Akshay Kumar Dutt, a Bengali writer, also supported this movement, rejecting supernatural explanations and emphasising rationalism. Rammohun Roy condemned idolatry, the dominance of priests, and polytheism. He upheld the principle of causality as the foundation of the universe and asserted that certainty was the sole criterion of truth.

In 1815, he founded Atmiya Sabha, which later evolved into Brahmo Samaj in 1828. Through Atmiya Sabha, Rammohun Roy waged a consistent battle against social and religious evils. The Brahmo Samaj aimed to become a strong platform for humanism, monotheism, and social regeneration.

Rammohun was against the practice of *Sati*. His efforts led to the abolition of *Sati* in 1829. He also raised his voice against



formed his Naba Bidhan (New Dispensation) and shifted his focus towards creating a universalist religion.

Arya Samaj was founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. The Samaj gained popularity by criticising existing Indian practices such as idolatry, polytheism, child marriage, taboos on widow remarriage, and Brahmin predominance. It attracted reform-minded individuals, and the movement grew rapidly, overshadowing the Brahmo Samaj.

Key leaders like Guru Dutt, Lala Hans Raj, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Lala Munshi Ram played a significant role in the growth of the Samaj in Punjab. The Samaj conducted mass purification and conversion ceremonies called *Shuddhi*, which brought more members to the organisation. By 1921, it had reached half a million members.

Despite its initial unity, the Arya Samaj split in 1893 over issues such as diet and education. The moderate faction, led by Hans Raj and Lajpat Rai, focused on establishing schools and colleges and founded the chain of “Dayanand Anglo-Indian Colleges.” The militant faction, founded by Lekh Ram and Munshi Ram, emphasised the need for traditional Indian education and the electorate.

According to Kenneth Jones, both factions shifted their focus from promoting “Arya Dharma” to a broader “Indian consciousness.” This was often marked by communalism and anti-Indian sentiment. By the late 19th century, the Arya Samaj, despite its early opposition, aligned more closely with orthodox Hinduism, which was also experiencing its own revival through various societies and conferences. This “revivalism” contributed to the declaration of a distinct Indian identity.

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3.1.3 Prarthana Samaj

Prarthana Samaj was founded in 1867, with Atmaram Pandurang as its founder president. However, the real spirit behind its foundation was Mahadev Gobind Ranade, who was supported by Bhandarkar and N. G. Chandavarkar. K. T. Telang, who attended the Samaj regularly, never became a member.

Prarthana Samaj also preached monotheism and denounced idol worship, priestly domination, and caste distinctions. Later, the Samaj became connected to the Maharashtrian Bhakti tradition. The Prarthana Samaj adopted a more cautious approach to social and religious reforms. Mahadev Gobind Ranade highlighted that the goal of the Prarthana Samaj was not to sever ties with traditional society but rather to implement gradual reforms that would not disrupt the existing social structure. The reforms envisioned by the Samaj evolved slowly, without breaking the cultural and religious traditions of India.

This slow growth helped the movement establish branches in Poona, Surat, Ahmedabad, Karachi, Kirkee, Kolhapur, and Satara. The influence of the movement even spread to other regions, where it was led by Veerasalingam Pantulu, a Telugu reformer. By the early twentieth century, the Samaj had expanded significantly. However, in 1875, the Samaj faced a significant crisis when members led by S.P. Kelkar left Prarthana Samaj and joined Arya Samaj.

3.1.4 Satya Shodhak Samaj

The anti-Brahmin warning was first raised in Maharashtra in the 1870s by Jyotiba Phule through his book *Ghulam-giri* (1872) and his organisation, Satya Shodhak Samaj. The Samaj was founded in 1873 and proclaimed the need to save the lower castes from Brahmanical scriptures. According to Gail Omvedt, the movement emphasised dualism within the Satya Shodhak movement. He

stated that it contained “both an elite-based conservative trend and a more genuine mass-based radicalism”.

The Samaj was formed to encourage education among lower castes and to fight against social injustice, caste discrimination, and Brahmanical dominance in society. The Samaj aimed to abolish caste-based discrimination and promote social equality. It encouraged widow remarriage and opposed child marriage and the *sati* system. Thus, the Samaj laid the foundation for the social justice movement in India, advocating equality, dignity, and education for all. The Samaj used vernacular language to spread its ideas among the masses, making the movement more accessible to the common people.

Phule argued that Brahmin dominance and their control were the primary causes of the oppression faced by the Shudras. He challenged the Orientalist Aryanisation theory, which portrayed Brahmins as the superior civilising force in India. Instead, he advocated that Brahmins were the descendants of alien Aryans who had subjugated the land, and this imbalance needed to be corrected through a common movement for social reform.

Support for the Samaj was boosted when the Maharaja of Kolhapur extended his support to the movement. He introduced reservations in his administration and encouraged the education of lower castes. Following the teachings of Phule, he promoted religious rituals without Brahmin priests, challenging caste-based privileges.

3.1.5 Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society was founded in the United States by Madam H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott. Colonel H.S. Olcott later came to India and established the headquarters of the Society at Adayar near Madras in 1882. The movement gained momentum in India due to the leadership of



Annie Besant, who arrived in India in 1893.

The Theosophists advocated for the revival of ancient religions, particularly Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism. They also promoted the concept of the movement of the soul and the idea of universal brotherhood. The movement led by Westerners glorified Indian religious and philosophical traditions, which helped boost the confidence of Indians.

The three core objectives of the Society are to form a universal brotherhood of humanity, regardless of race, sex, caste, or colour. The Society encouraged the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science. Thirdly, the Society investigates the unexplained laws of nature.

The contribution of Annie Besant to the spread of the Theosophical Society in India is significant. In 1893, she arrived in India alongside H.S. Olcott. Besant served as the second President of the Theosophical Society from 1907 to 1933 and was often referred to as a 'Diamond Soul'. She advocated for women's upliftment and worked towards radical social changes but never sought to alter the spiritual nature of Indian women.

Annie Besant's major contribution was the establishment of the Central Indian School in Banaras in 1898, followed by the founding of the Central Indian School for Girls a few years later. She worked alongside prominent figures such as Bhagavan Das, Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti, and K.T. Telang to address societal needs.

From 1908 onward, Besant expanded the Theosophical headquarters at Adyar. To strengthen the connection between Adyar and the global Theosophical community, she initiated *The Adyar Bulletin*, which continued until 1929 and has since been replaced by the *Adyar Newsletter*.

3.1.6 Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1834- 86) was a saint who pursued religious salvation through the traditional paths of renunciation, meditation, and devotion (*bhakti*). He emphasised that there are many paths to salvation, and that the service of man is considered the service of God. The teachings of Paramhansa were popularised by his disciple Swami Vivekananda, who stressed the importance of social action. He argued that knowledge without practical application in the real world is meaningless. For Vivekananda, spirituality was not just about personal liberation but also about addressing the persistent social issues of the time. In 1898, he expressed this vision for India, saying, "For our own motherland, a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam...is the only hope."

In 1897, Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an organisation dedicated to humanitarian work and social service. The Mission was established to extend the ideas of Ramakrishna, focusing not only on personal salvation but also on the collective well-being of society. It set up schools, hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages, libraries, and other social service initiatives across India. Thus, the Mission emphasised not only personal salvation but also social service.

3.1.7 Aligarh Movement

Reform movements among Indians emerged late. The Indian upper classes tended to avoid contact with Western education, and it was after the revolt of 1857 that modern ideas of religion began to emerge. A significant step in this direction was the founding of the Muhammedan Literary Society in Calcutta in 1863. The Society promoted discussions on religion and social and political issues, mainly to help Indians embrace Western education.

One of the most important reformers among Indians was Sayyid Ahmed Khan. He was deeply influenced by modern scientific thought and dedicated his life to unifying it with Islam. His approach began with the declaration that the *Quran* was the sole authoritative text for Islam, while all other Islamic writings were considered secondary. According to him, any interpretation of the *Quran* that opposed human reason, science or nature was deemed a misinterpretation. He advocated for a critical approach and freedom of thought, stating that “So long as freedom of thought is not developed, there can be no civilised life.” He also spoke out against fanaticism, narrow-mindedness and exclusiveness.

With these intentions, the Aligarh movement was founded by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, whose main effort was to modernise the upper middle-class Indians through Western education. The movement gained the title ‘Aligarh’ because it had started in Aligarh. He established institutions like the Scientific Society, a literary and scientific society, and the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College. This college later became the centre for Western-style education among Indians.

His political philosophy was based on loyalty to the British Raj. As a result, he opposed the Indian National Congress, fearing that Indian-majority politics would sideline Indian interests. The Indian administration encouraged this position, and figures like Theodore Beck, the principal of Aligarh College, played a key role in reinforcing it. Beck helped to establish the Indian Patriotic Association in 1888 and the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association in 1893 to counter the growing influence of the Congress and to mobilise Indian support for Indian rule. The movement received Indian support, including a donation of Rs. 10,000 from the Viceroy, Lord Northbrook.

However, Sir Sayyid’s devoted approach to the British government was not universally accepted within the Indian community. Many religious scholars viewed this as a threat to their traditional authority. By the late 1890s, several Urdu newspapers in Punjab began to openly criticise the Aligarh school, arguing that it did not represent the broader interests of Indians. At the same time, more people from North India began to support the Congress.

After the death of Sir Sayyid in 1898, several young Indian leaders at Aligarh began to distance themselves from his political stance. Young leaders like Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali endeavoured to emphasise Islam as a mobilising force in Indian politics.

3.1.8 Self-Respect Movement

As the Justice Party faded, a more radical movement emerged: the Self-Respect Movement. This movement was led by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar). Periyar left the Congress in 1925, as the party could not ensure genuine equality for non-Brahmins. His discontent grew when Mahatma Gandhi visited Madras in 1927 and made a statement supporting *Varnashrama Dharma*. Outraged by this, he launched a critique of Aryanism, Brahmanism and Hinduism.

Periyar critiqued the concepts of Aryanism, Brahmanism, and Hinduism, which he viewed as systems of oppression against Sudras, Adi-Dravidas (untouchables), and women. He emphasised self-respect as a prerequisite for self-rule, advocating pride in Dravidian heritage and Tamil culture while being cautious not to alienate non-Tamil Dravidians. Despite these efforts, Tamil identity remained central to the movement, sometimes causing tensions between Tamil and Dravidian identities.

Periyar raised his voice against social evils

he also called for the creation of a separate Dravidian state for Dravidians. Naicker continued his advocacy for a separate Tamil state, and in 1944, the Justice Party formally changed its name to the Dravida Kazhagam (D.K.) with the goal of creating a separate Dravidian state.

With the rise of Annadurai, a shift occurred in the D.K. In 1949, Annadurai and his associates split from the Dravidar Kazhagam (D.K.) to establish the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.), a political party committed to the creation of Dravida Naḍu, a separate Tamil state.

3.1.9 Backward Class Movements

Conversion from the religion did not guarantee liberation for Dalits, as they were re-absorbed into existing social structures despite their new religion. The idea of self-respect imparted by Christian missionaries and the spread of modern education can be considered transformative in this regard. These influences encouraged a sense of dignity and empowerment among the marginalised sections. Some conscious segments of Dalits took the message of self-respect and blended it with their local traditions of the *bhakti* movement. This fusion led to the construction of an ideological framework for protesting caste-based oppression.

As a result, organised caste movements began to emerge among Indian communities. Some of the participants included the Ezhavas and Pulayas of South India, the Mahars of Maharashtra, the Chamars of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the communities of Chhattisgarh, the Balmikis of India, and the Namasudras of Bengal. This movement aimed to create social justice, dignity, and equal rights.

One of the key strategies was to adopt visible symbols that indicated high ritual status. This included wearing the sacred



thread and entering temples that were historically inaccessible to them. Several temple entry movements emerged in the twentieth century. Notable among these were the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924) and Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931) in Kerala, the Munshiganj Kali Temple Satyagraha in Bengal (1929), and the Kalaram Temple Satyagraha in Nasik (1930).

Beyond their religious rights, the Dalits also demanded social equality. When these demands were denied, they resorted to direct action. One significant instance of this demand was the Travancore breast-cloth controversy of 1859, where Nadar women sought the right to cover their breasts like upper-caste women, leading to violent riots. The issue persisted, causing further conflicts in Quilon (1905) between the Ezhavas and Nairs.

In Maharashtra, the renowned Indian leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar led protests in 1927. He organised a large-scale satyagraha in Mahad, where 10,000 to 15,000 Dalits marched to demand their rights to access water from the public tank, which was controlled by the local municipality. These movements, therefore, made an effort to dismantle caste discrimination, fought for equal access to public spaces, and laid the foundation for Indian self-respect.

During this period, several reformist religious sects emerged, advocating devotion as well as social equality. Among these sects, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) is an important body that emphasises that simple devotion to God is sufficient for salvation, rejecting the authority of Brahmins over religious and social life. Sree Narayana Guru argued that there should be “one religion, one caste, and one God for man,” which was later adopted by

his disciple Sahodaran Ayyapan to advocate for “no religion, no caste, and no God for mankind.”

The movement of self-assertion and the reclaiming of lost rights was evident in the Ad - Dharam movement among the Chamars of Punjab and the Adi-Indian movement among the Chamars and other urban Indian communities in Uttar Pradesh. Some religious sects attempted to reverse the caste hierarchy. For example, the Satnampanth sect among the Chamars of Chhattisgarh used religious symbols to demonstrate they were superior to Brahmins. Similarly, the Balahari sect among the Hadis of Bengal imagined that Hadis were at the top and Brahmins were at the bottom.

Although many of these movements did not last long, they had a profound impact on Indian society. They not only united Dalits under a sense of brotherhood but also openly defied Indian notions of hierarchy and untouchability. The rejection of Indian theology reached its climax when, in December 1927, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar publicly burned a copy of *Manusmriti*. He called for a complete transformation of Indian society and theology, urging Dalits to focus their efforts on political empowerment.

In the early 20th century, backward caste movements focused on political solutions to social and religious discrimination. Many Indian groups sought not just access to public institutions but also reservations in education, jobs, and government as compensation for past injustices. The Indian government supported this by introducing protective policies in the 1920s.



Recap

- ◆ Brahmo Samaj was founded by Raja Rammohun Roy in 1828.
- ◆ It promoted monotheism, rationality, and social reforms like opposition to *sati*, polygamy, and child marriage.
- ◆ Later, leaders like Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen expanded the movement.
- ◆ Arya Samaj was established by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875.
- ◆ This movement rejected idolatry and emphasised Vedic teachings, education, and purification (*Shuddhi*).
- ◆ Leaders like Lala Hans Raj and Lala Lajpat Rai played key roles.
- ◆ Prarthana Samaj was founded by Atmaram Pandurang in 1867, but Mahadev Govind Ranade led its activities.
- ◆ Satya Shodhak Samaj was started by Jyotiba Phule in 1873.
- ◆ Satya Shodhak Samaj worked for the upliftment of lower castes, opposed Brahminical dominance, and promoted education.
- ◆ H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott founded the Theosophical Society, which was later expanded in India by Annie Besant.
- ◆ Ramakrishna Mission was established by Swami Vivekananda.
- ◆ It focused on spiritual nationalism, social service, and education.
- ◆ The Aligarh Movement was led by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, and it aimed to modernise Muslim education and promote loyalty to the British.
- ◆ The Self-Respect Movement was led by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar) in 1925, and it fought against Brahmin dominance and caste oppression.

Objective Questions

1. Who is known as the “Father of Modern India”?
2. Which reform movement was associated with the abolition of *Sati*?
3. Who founded the Arya Samaj?
4. What was the main focus of the Aligarh Movement?
5. Which movement introduced the concept of ‘Shuddhi’?
6. Who led the Ramakrishna Mission after Ramakrishna Paramahansa?
7. Which movement is associated with the Dravidian identity and anti-Brahmin ideology?
8. Who founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj?
9. Which reformer emphasised the slogan “Go Back to the Vedas”?
10. What organisation was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897?
11. Which act legalised inter-caste and widow remarriages, leading to further division within the Brahmo Samaj?
12. Which publication was launched by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker to propagate the ideals of the Self-Respect Movement?
13. Which movement advocated “one religion, one caste, and one God for man”?

Answers

1. Raja Rammohun Roy
2. Brahmo Samaj
3. Dayanand Saraswati
4. Modern education for Muslims



5. Arya Samaj
6. Swami Vivekananda
7. Self-Respect Movement
8. Jyotiba Phule
9. Dayanand Saraswati
10. Ramakrishna Mission
11. The Brahmo Marriage Act of 1872
12. Kudi Arasu (People's Government)
13. Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP)

Assignments

1. Compare and contrast the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj in terms of ideology and social reforms.
2. How did the reform movements of the 19th century lay the foundation for modern India?
3. Discuss the impact of 19th-century socio-religious movements on the national movement in India.
4. Examine the relationship between social reform and nationalism.
5. Examine the contributions of Jyotiba Phule and the Satya Shodhak Samaj.

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UNIT

The Concept of Nationalism

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand historiographical approaches to Indian nationalism
- ◆ examine the key arguments of the Cambridge, Marxist, and Subaltern schools of thought
- ◆ discuss the debates on the origin of Indian nationalism and the role of British rule
- ◆ explain the significance of the early political associations in the development of Indian nationalism
- ◆ identify the early political associations and their contributions to the freedom movement

Prerequisite

The emergence of Indian nationalism is understood as a complex process shaped by colonial rule, socio-political movements, and political and intellectual discourses. Historians have debated whether the idea of a unified nation existed before British rule or developed as a result of colonial domination. Early nationalist thinkers and reformers sought to construct this modern political identity by navigating these challenges.

We have various historical perspectives to explain the rise of nationalism. The emergence of the middle class, industrialisation, and print capitalism have fostered the idea of national consciousness among the people. Additionally, the role of early political associations such as the British Indian Association and the Indian Association has laid the foundation for organised political activism in India. These associations aimed to attain Indian representation in governance, setting

the stage for the emergence of the Indian National Congress in 1885. The main concern of this unit is to explore and highlight the historiographical dimensions of the emergence of the Indian National Congress, demonstrating its evolution through debates and struggles.

Keywords

Indian nationalism, Cambridge School, Marxist School, Subaltern Studies, Political Associations, Early Political Organisations, British Indian Association, Indian Association of Calcutta, Landholder's Society

Discussion

3.2.1 Debating the Idea of the Indian Nation: A Historiographical Perspective

Historians have argued that the idea of a modern Indian political nation did not exist before British rule. Therefore, it is debatable whether such a nation was present within Indian civilisation or gradually evolved. Indian nationalists worked to prove their progress within a modern state but faced challenges in uniting a diverse population and demanding self-rule. From this diversity, the idea of a 'nation in the making' emerged, a phrase used by Surendranath Banerjee. However, the concept of a nation remains a debatable topic. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay analysed various opinions to understand how Indians "imagined" their nation.

Partha Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalism was a "different" but "derivative discourse" of Western ideas. Similarly, Ashis Nandy sees it as a response shaped by Western imperialism. However, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi emphasised Indian civilisation's unique universalism and sought social unity through diversity. These

ideas, however, were largely rejected by Western-educated Indian nationalists. C.A. Bayly explores the "pre-history of nationalism," suggesting that Indian nationalism was rooted in earlier territorial identities, patriotism, and indigenous moral ideas of governance.

Early nationalist historians focused on a unified national consciousness based on anti-colonial sentiment, patriotism, and pride in India's ancient heritage while ignoring social conflicts. In contrast, a new perspective, termed "neo-traditionalist" by Rajat Ray, reiterated old imperialist ideas that Indian politics was based on caste, region, and religion rather than modern class or national identities. The major substance of change in this context was the institutional innovations of the colonial state.

Another school that emerged was the Cambridge School, which critiqued the emphasis on localities. The Cambridge School historians focused mainly on local movements and questioned the idea of a unified nationalist movement. They argued that British imperialism was weak, so the national response to imperialism was also weak. It was merely a struggle between competing



interest groups looking for colonial favour. According to this view, the nationalist leaders were motivated by personal or group interests rather than ideology.

Critics argued that this sceptical approach, which ignores nationalist sentiments, reduces the movement to a mere tussle for power. Tapan Raychaudhuri referred to it as “Animal Politics.” Later, the early proponents of this model moved away from it, particularly C. A. Bayly in his *Origins of Nationality in South Asia* (1998), which marked an important shift in historical thinking, challenging this earlier interpretation of the Cambridge School.

The Marxist school analysed nationalism through the lens of class struggle and economic development during the colonial period. Early Marxists like R.P. Dutt and Soviet historian V.I. Pavlov argued that Indian nationalism was led by the bourgeoisie, who worked to serve their own class interests while neglecting others. Later, Marxist scholars such as S.N. Mukherjee, Sumit Sarkar, and Bipan Chandra introduced more nuanced perspectives. Mukherjee highlighted the complexity of nationalism by analysing factors like caste and modern political languages. Sumit Sarkar challenged the idea that India’s educated class was solely composed of the bourgeoisie, instead viewing them as “traditional intellectuals” influenced by ideologies such as liberalism and nationalism.

Bipan Chandra and his colleagues provided a Marxist interpretation of nationalism in his work *India’s Struggle for Independence*. They argued that the bourgeoisie did not solely control the Indian nationalist movement, which was a popular movement involving multiple classes. A major challenge to this perspective emerged with the publication of *Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha in 1982. Influenced by Antonio Gramsci, Guha contended that mainstream history overlooked the role of ordinary people,

or “subalterns,” in shaping nationalism. According to Guha, while the subalterns sometimes joined elite-led movements, the nationalist leadership failed to truly represent them.

The historiographical approach to Indian nationalism witnessed a shift when Sumit Sarkar critiqued the class-based analysis. He emphasised community, culture, and identity. Partha Chatterjee made a significant contribution to understanding nationalism in India, arguing that it was a “different” but “derivative” discourse from the West. He outlined three stages of this nationalism: the “moment of departure,” when nationalist consciousness emerged through Western influences; the “moment of manoeuvre,” when mass mobilisation occurred; and the “moment of arrival,” when nationalism became a discourse of order and power.

Gyan Prakash challenged Chatterjee’s idea in *Another Reason* (1999), where Chatterjee posited that the nation-state in India was merely an imitation of Western models. Prakash argued that the Indian nation-state was not just copying Western models but rather rethinking and critiquing Western modernity. It was shaped by our own spiritual and cultural traditions, combined with a scientific approach.

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay opined that beyond defined schools of thought, there is a wide range of writings on Indian nationalism. Indian nationalism, therefore, occupies a disputed space, making it difficult to find a universally acceptable viewpoint.

3.2.2 The Rise of Nationalism and the Emergence of the Middle Class

Nationalism emerged in India in the late nineteenth century. The rise of nationalism is viewed as a result of industrialisation, urbanisation, and print capitalism. According

to Benedict Anderson (1983), nationalism in developing countries is merely a limitation of the Western model.

Partha Chatterjee critiqued this Western-centric view and argued that if the West defined the colonial experience, what would be left for the colonised society to imagine for itself? He suggests that the idea of Indian nationalism was first conceptualised in the cultural sphere before it took on political aspects. Even though the colonial government controlled governance, Indian society was shaping its idea of modernity, which was distinct from the West. This cultural assertion laid the foundation for India's national movement.

C. A. Bayly traced the roots of Indian nationalism to pre-colonial times. He argues that Indian nationalism developed a 'traditional patriotism' that existed before Western influence. He noted that the sense of belonging at the initial stage was expressed through terms like *desh* and *nāḍu*. Local sentiments for language and religion developed in regions like Bengal, Maharashtra, Awadh, and Mysore, gradually expanding to other areas. As British rule extended, this traditional patriotism inspired local critiques of colonial rule. The growing influence of Christian missionaries further incited resentment, with many perceiving it as an attack on Indigenous culture. This ultimately culminated in the Revolt of 1857, where citizens united against British authority.

Following the revolt, India underwent numerous changes, including the spread of education, the development of communication systems such as railways and telegraphs, and the emergence of nationalist sentiments. In the development of Indian nationalism, Western education played a significant role in these changes. Although it aimed to cultivate loyalty to the British among the Indian intelligentsia, they used

it to critique colonialism.

3.2.3 Early Political Associations

We have seen that Raja Rammohun Roy was the first Indian leader to initiate a movement for political reforms in India. Following his efforts, several public associations emerged across the country after 1836. These associations were led by wealthy and aristocratic elites, often referred to as "prominent persons" by Bipan Chandra, and were primarily local or provincial in nature. The major objectives of these organisations included administrative reforms, the participation of Indians in governance, and the promotion of education.

After 1858, a divide emerged between educated Indians and the British administration. Indians began to develop critical viewpoints on British politics. The rising disapproval of the government led to political activism and the creation of various associations.

The beginning of organised political activity in India can be traced to the establishment of the Landholder's Society in 1837. It was an association of landholders from Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, with the principal aim of safeguarding its class interests. In 1843, another organisation, the Bengal British India Society, was formed to protect and promote the general public interest.

The British Indian Association was established in 1851 in Calcutta by merging the Landholder's Society and the British India Society. It emerged as an influential voluntary organisation representing the interests of landlords. The significance of this association grew after the Indian Councils Act of 1861, which allowed for limited Indian representation in legislative councils. Members of this association were often nominated to these councils, and their dominance persisted until



the Indian Councils Act of 1892 introduced a limited electoral system.

Unlike its predecessor, the Landholder's Society, the British Indian Association was composed entirely of Indians. The primary aim of this association was to advocate for the rights and interests of Indian subjects before the British parliament. Initially, the association attempted to unify the efforts of the three presidencies by opening branches in Bombay and Madras. However, regional barriers led to the creation of separate bodies: the Madras Native Association and the Bombay Association in 1852.

All three associations submitted petitions to London for greater Indian participation in governance and also criticised the 'dual system' of administration, heavy taxation, monopolies on salt and opium, and inadequate public works, demanding that Indian sentiments be considered. However, their demands did not challenge British rule. Historians like S. R. Mehrotra note that the Government of India Act of 1853 ignored all their demands.

In 1866, Dadabhai Naoroji organised the East Indian Association in London. The association was formed to discuss the Indian question and influence British officials to promote welfare in India. Later, he organised several branches of this association in India.

The Indian Association of Calcutta was one of the most important pre-Congress nationalist organisations. The association opposed the conservative and pro-landlord policies of the British Indian Association. The aspirations of young people led to

Surendranath Banerjee becoming its leader. Banerjee had been unfairly dismissed from the Indian Civil Service because his superiors could not accept an independent-minded Indian in their ranks. Following this, he delivered speeches on national issues to students in Calcutta in 1875.

In July 1876, Surendranath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose founded the Indian Association. Its aim was to foster strong public opinion on political matters and to bring Indians under a common political platform. To encourage mass participation, the association set a low membership fee, making it accessible to people from poorer backgrounds. It expanded quickly, and many branches of the association were opened in rural regions.

In 1870, Justice Ranade and his associates founded the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. In 1884, M. Viraraghavachari, G. Subramaniya Iyer, Ananda Charlu, and others established the Madras Mahajan Sabha. Similarly, in 1885, Pheroze Shah Mehta, K.T. Telang, Badruddin Tyabji, and others formed the Bombay Presidency Association.

By that time, the need for a nationwide political organisation had become persistent. The nationalist leaders recognised the importance of a unified organisation to fight against foreign rule and exploitation. Although the existing organisations played a significant role in criticising the British, their intensity and influence remained limited. Therefore, a new stage was set for a more unified and representative nationalist movement.

Recap

- ◆ The existence of a unified Indian nation before British rule is debated.
- ◆ Surendranath Banerjee's "Nation in the Making" highlights the evolving nature of Indian nationalism.
- ◆ Some scholars argue that Indian nationalism is a "derivative discourse" of Western ideas.
- ◆ Others trace Indian nationalism to pre-colonial territorial identities.
- ◆ Early nationalists focused on unified national consciousness.
- ◆ The neo-traditionalist view emphasises caste, region, and religion.
- ◆ The Cambridge School argues that nationalism was a struggle for colonial favour, not ideology.
- ◆ Marxist schools analyse nationalism through class struggle and economic development.
- ◆ Subaltern studies highlight the role of ordinary people in nationalism.
- ◆ Partha Chatterjee outlined three stages: departure, manoeuvre, and arrival.
- ◆ Industrialisation, urbanisation, and print capitalism fuelled Indian nationalism.
- ◆ The early political associations focused on administrative reforms and Indian participation in colonial governance.
- ◆ The Landholder's Society was one of the earliest associations that protected class interests.
- ◆ The British Indian Association mainly advocated for Indian rights and interests.
- ◆ The Indian Association of Calcutta aimed to foster public opinion and bring Indians under a common platform.

Objective Questions

1. Who used the phrase “nation in the making”?
2. Which school of thought argues that Indian nationalism was a struggle for colonial favour?
3. What did the Marxist school primarily analyse nationalism through?
4. Which historian argued that Indian nationalism was a “derivative discourse”?
5. What was the primary focus of the Landholder’s Society?
6. Which association aimed to bring Indians under a common political platform?
7. Who founded the East Indian Association in London?
8. Which historian traced the roots of Indian nationalism to pre-colonial days?
9. Who emphasised community, culture, and identity in the study of nationalism?
10. Which historian critiqued Benedict Anderson’s view of nationalism as a mere imitation of Western models?
11. What did Tapan Raychaudhuri call the Cambridge School’s approach to Indian nationalism?
12. Which association was formed by merging the Landholder’s Society and the British India Society?
13. Who led the Indian Association of Calcutta?

Answers

1. Surendranath Banerjee
2. Cambridge School
3. Class struggle

4. Partha Chatterjee
5. Protecting class interests
6. Indian Association of Calcutta
7. Dadabhai Naoroji
8. C.A. Bayly
9. Sumit Sarkar
10. Partha Chatterjee
11. Animal politics
12. The British Indian Association
13. Surendranath Banerjee

Assignments

1. Evaluate the debates surrounding the origin of Indian nationalism.
2. Analyse the role of the emerging middle class in the rise of nationalism.
3. Discuss the significance of early political associations.
4. Analyse how the three stages of nationalism explain the evolution of Indian nationalist thought and action.

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UNIT

Indian National Congress

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ understand the formation of the Indian National Congress
- ◆ identify key figures in the formation of the Indian National Congress and their contributions
- ◆ explain the objectives of the Indian National Congress
- ◆ discuss the safety valve theory
- ◆ assess the early political methods of the Indian National Congress

Prerequisite

The genesis of the Indian National Congress can be traced back to the activities of early political associations. The birth of the Indian National Congress (INC) is often debated. The INC was founded in December 1885, marking the beginning of organised nationalist politics in India. The organisation was established under the guidance of A.O. Hume, a retired British civil servant. The INC aimed to promote national unity and political awareness, providing a platform for leaders to raise their demands and work for national unity.

However, the creation of the INC has been a subject of debate among scholars. Some argue that the British supported its formation as a 'safety valve', while others believe it was an outcome of the nationalist sentiments that prevailed during the period. Despite these debates, the INC played a pivotal role in shaping the nationalist struggle, evolving from a moderate phase to becoming the driving force behind the struggle for Indian independence. This unit will, therefore, delve into the origins, objectives, and early challenges of the INC.

Keywords

Indian National Congress, A.O. Hume, W.C. Bonnerji, Safety Valve Theory, Moderates, Political Awakening

Discussion

3.3.1 Formation of INC: Different Theories

The Indian National Congress (INC) was founded in December 1885. Among its founders, A.O. Hume, a retired English ICS officer, played an important role. He organised the first session of the Indian National Congress in Bombay in December 1885. The session was chaired by W.C. Bonnerji and attended by 72 delegates. The objectives of the INC were to promote friendly relations among the nationalist political elites from different regions and foster a sense of unity irrespective of caste, religion, or region. Most importantly, the INC aimed to organise public opinion across the country.

According to Bipan Chandra, the “safety valve theory,” a popular yet misleading theory, is associated with the formation of the INC. This theory posits that the Congress was created with the guidance of the British government, under Viceroy Lord Dufferin, to serve as a mild constitutional outlet for rising discontent among the masses. The idea was that the INC was meant to pacify and channel Indian frustration in a peaceful manner, thereby preventing violent protests. The theory suggests that this was a strategy by the government to maintain control over India by defusing potential revolutionary movements before they could take place.

Lala Lajpat Rai openly criticised the Congress for using the safety valve theory. In his article in *Young India*, he argued that the Indian National Congress (INC) was

founded primarily to protect the British Empire rather than to secure political liberty for India. According to him, the Congress was a product of Lord Dufferin’s strategic planning, designed to diffuse rising popular discontent and prevent any revolutionary movement in India. Therefore, the INC was a tool for maintaining the colonial system, not for dismantling it.

Rajani Palme Dutt, in his work *India Today*, further critiqued the theory. He argued that the Congress was established through direct governmental initiative, in a plan secretly pre-arranged with the Viceroy. He claimed that the British had deliberately created the Congress as a ‘safety valve’ to channel anti-imperialist sentiments, thereby using the Congress as a mechanism to safeguard British rule. He also acknowledged that the Congress became a vehicle for mass movement; however, the ‘original sin’ of its creation has left a mark on the Congress’s political trajectory.

Dutt remarked that the Congress had a dual character: firstly, it worked within the system and cooperated with imperialism to prevent mass movements; on the other hand, it became the face of the nationalist struggle. This dual role reflected the conflicting interests of the Indian bourgeoisie and continued throughout the history of the Congress.

Another critic of the theory was M.S. Golwalkar, the leader of the RSS. In 1939, he used this theory to criticise the Congress and

accuse it of discouraging Hindu nationalism through its secular stance. In his pamphlet, *We*, he argued that the Hindu national identity had been weakened by these nationalists who promoted democracy and the false idea that Hindus and Muslims shared common ground.

However, C.F. Andrews and Girija Mukherji fully accepted the safety valve theory in their work *The Rise and Growth of the Congress in India* (1938). They viewed it as a positive mechanism that prevented 'useless bloodshed'.

According to Bipan Chandra, the foundation of the INC was not a severe event or historical accident; it was the culmination of the political awakening that occurred in the 1860s and 1870s. By 1885, Indians engaged in politics began to perceive themselves not as mere representatives of a narrow section but as advocates of national concern. Between 1875 and 1885, young nationalists were dissatisfied with the older political organisations and their efforts. Hence, the need for an all-India political group became increasingly persistent.

Before the Congress was founded, Indians gained experience and confidence through numerous protests and movements, such as retaining import duties on cotton, demanding Indian representation in government jobs, and protesting against the Vernacular Press Act, the Arms Act, and the Ilbert Bill (1883). It, therefore, becomes clear that the INC in 1885 was a culmination of the political efforts of previous years.

3.3.2 Objectives of the Indian National Congress

The first major objective of the national leaders was to strengthen the process of national unity among Indians. Leaders like Tilak and Surendranath Banerjee asserted that India was a "nation-in-the-making." In 1891,

P. Ananda Charlu described the Congress as a "mighty nationaliser," emphasising its role in uniting Indians. Newspapers like *Indu Prakash* also recognised the Congress as a new force that fosters a common national identity.

The making of India was thus a slow process. The Congress leaders understood India's diversity and recognised the need for special efforts to maintain its unity. To achieve this, they decided to hold the Congress sessions in different parts of the country and agreed to choose Presidents from various regions. To alleviate religious fears and include minorities, a rule was established in 1888 stating that no resolution would be passed if most Hindu or Muslim delegates opposed it. In 1889, another rule ensured that minority communities, such as Parsis, Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, received fair representation in legislative councils. The Congress, therefore, made efforts to uphold India's secularism and strengthen national unity.

The second major objective of the early Congress was to create a shared political platform where people from different parts of India could unite, discuss common issues, and fight for their rights against British rule. Dadabhai Naoroji believed that the Congress should represent the political aspirations of all Indians, not just certain groups. The first step toward this goal was the politicisation and unification of the opinions of the educated populace, followed by others. However, this was a slow and challenging process. Critics argued that the early Congress leaders primarily employed petitions, appeals, and discussions rather than mass protests. Nonetheless, it is evident that these methods contributed to the politicisation of the people.

Another essential goal was the creation of a unified national leadership. The leaders aimed to organise the populace, a vision that



was also reflected in the objectives of the Congress leaders. W. C. Bonnerjee emphasised that the goal of the Indian National Congress (INC) was to foster unity and eliminate racial, religious, or provincial prejudices among the advocates of the national cause.

According to Bipan Chandra, the Congress functioned as a movement, not merely as a party. It remained open to individuals from

all social classes and backgrounds, accepting various political perspectives and ideologies. The early nationalist leaders aimed to establish the foundation for a secular and democratic national movement, raise political awareness among the masses, create a centralised leadership at the all-India level, and develop a strong anti-colonial nationalist ideology.

Recap

- ◆ The INC was established in 1885 by A.O.Hume.
- ◆ The first session was held in Bombay under W.C. Bonnerjee.
- ◆ It aimed to promote unity, develop political awareness, and organise public opinion across India.
- ◆ The safety valve theory suggests that the British created the INC to control the rising Indian discontent peacefully.
- ◆ Lala Lajpat Rai critiqued the INC and argued that it was a British tool.
- ◆ Bipan Chandra noticed that the INC was not a British creation but the result of growing nationalist consciousness.
- ◆ The INC holds sessions in different regions and tries to include diverse communities.
- ◆ The early Congress leaders used petitions, appeals, and discussions as major methodologies rather than mass protests to raise political awareness.

Objective Questions

1. When was the Indian National Congress founded?
2. Who organised the first session of the INC?
3. Who chaired the first session of the INC?
4. Where was the first session of the INC held in 1885?
5. Who criticised the INC for being a product of the 'Safety Valve Theory'?
6. Who was the Viceroy of India at the time of the formation of the INC?

7. Who described the INC as a “mighty nationaliser”?
8. Which book by R. Palme Dutt critiques the formation of the INC?
9. What was the primary method used by early INC leaders to achieve their goals?
10. Which newspaper recognised the INC as a force fostering national identity?

Answers

1. 1885
2. A.O. Hume
3. W.C. Bonnerji
4. Bombay
5. Lala Lajpat Rai
6. Lord Dufferin
7. P. Ananda Charlu
8. *India Today*
9. Petitions and appeals
10. Indu Prakash

Assignments

1. How did the INC contribute to the rise of a nationalist movement in India?
2. Compare the views of R. Palme Dutt and Bipan Chandra regarding the INC.
3. Discuss the role of the Indian National Congress in the early phase of the national movement.
4. Examine the contributions of the Moderates in shaping the programme of the Indian National Congress.
5. Identify the aims and objectives of the Indian National Congress during its early years.

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UNIT

Moderate Phase

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the key demands and objectives of the moderate leaders of the INC
- ◆ analyse the economic critique of British rule- the drain theory
- ◆ understand the reasons for the limited mass participation in Congress during this phase
- ◆ discuss the transition from the moderate phase to a more radical phase

Prerequisite

The period from 1885 to 1905 is considered the moderate phase in Indian politics. This era was marked by the early activities of the Indian National Congress (INC). During this time, the Congress leaders focused their demands on constitutional reforms, economic policies, and administrative changes. Primarily, they adopted a petition-based approach, emphasising slow and gradual reform rather than mass agitation. The early ideologies were influenced by Western political thought; they believed in persuasion and dialogue with the British government. The economic critique, known as the drain theory proposed by Dadabhai Naoroji, became the foundation for the later nationalist movement. Gradually, a faction emerged that believed in aggressive action, resulting in a split within the Congress and subsequent developments. This unit will concentrate on the moderate phase, which spanned from 1885 to 1905, and will discuss how moderate politics advocated for rights and self-governance.

Keywords

Moderate phase, Drain theory, Economic nationalism, Self-government, Permanent Settlement, Constitutional reform

Discussion

3.4.1 Moderate Phase (1885-1905)

The programme of the Congress from 1885 to 1905 is regarded as a moderate phase in Indian politics. It emphasised the need for moderate constitutional reform, economic reforms, and administrative reorganisation. The Congress convened annual meetings and passed similar resolutions each year, focusing on three main grievances: political, administrative, and economic. The primary political demand was the reform of the Legislative Council, advocating for increased power and representation in local bodies, commerce, and universities. Consequently, the immediate demands of the Congress did not include self-government or democracy; they expected that freedom would gradually expand. By 1906, Naoroji expressed his views on *swarajas* “self-government or *swaraj* like that of the United Kingdom or the colonies.”

Among the administrative reforms, the Congress prioritised the demand for the Indianisation of administrative services. Indianisation was promoted as a challenge against racism, and it would also reduce the drain of wealth. Other administrative demands included the separation of the judiciary, the extension of trial by jury, the repeal of the Arms Act, and higher positions in the Army for Indians. These demands reflected a call for racial equality alongside a concern for civil rights.

The moderates called for simultaneous civil service examinations in both India and

London, along with an increase in the age limit for candidates from 19 to 23 years to provide fair opportunities for Indian aspirants and reduce British monopoly over higher administrative services. However, this proposal was rejected by Charles Wood, who claimed that India lacked institutions capable of preparing candidates for the exam.

One of the significant contributions of the moderates was the economic critique of colonialism. This economic nationalism became the key theme of later nationalist movements. The three notable figures associated with this critique were Dadabhai Naoroji, M.G. Ranade, and R.C. Dutt. The central argument of this criticism was that British colonialism evolved from direct plunder and tribute to economic exploitation through free trade and foreign capital investment. India was reduced to a mere supplier of raw materials and a consumer of manufactured products. Dadabhai Naoroji propounded the ‘drain theory’, which is a key aspect of this critique. According to this theory, India’s wealth was drained through home charges, military expenses, and guaranteed interest payments on railway investments. This led to heavy land revenue demands and increased peasant impoverishment.

The moderates raised economic issues concerning the general poverty of India, particularly regarding the drain of wealth. Resolutions were passed to enquire about poverty and famines, demanding cuts in home charges and military expenditure, as well as the removal of unnecessary tariffs and

excise duties. The demand for the extension of the Permanent Settlement was also related to the drain of wealth argument, as its over-assessment was responsible for forced sales by the peasants, creating an export surplus. The early Congress also showed concern for broader social issues; resolutions regarding salt taxes were made, matters concerning the treatment of Indian coolies abroad were examined, and the suffering caused by forest administration was addressed.

Moderate politics maintained overall consistency in its objectives and methods of agitation. These were influenced by utilitarian theories and by thinkers such as Edmund Burke, John Stuart Mill, and John Morley. The moderates believed that governance should be guided by practicality rather than moral or ethical principles. They viewed the British constitution as unbreakable and frequently appealed to the British Parliament, accusing the Government of India of undermining constitutional principles. However, as mentioned above, they did not demand complete equality and liberation, tending instead to advocate for gradual reforms.

Most moderates viewed British rule as a force for modernisation, believing that Indians needed time to prepare for self-government. They placed their faith in the British Parliament. Their method thus relied on constitutional means and persuasion rather than confrontation. Even in this, the early nationalist leaders recognised the exploitative nature of British rule. They believed that full political freedom in India would be attained gradually. Hence, they had deep faith in British rule, hoping that Indians would be recognised as equal partners in the empire and enjoy British citizenship.

3.4.2 Nature and Social Composition of Early Congress Leaders

The Congress leaders tended to be Anglicised in their personal lives. This led the early Congress leaders to adopt moderate politics. Although they critiqued certain rules of the British government, they admired British rule and believed in its 'providential' nature. Additionally, their professional commitments left them with little time for political activity. They, therefore, believed in gradual progress and were satisfied with minor concessions from the British. Many of the Congress members had developed a highly elitist lifestyle, which created a disconnect from 'the lower orders' and fostered a dependence on the British for law and order. Early Congress activities demonstrated that the lower classes did not widely participate, as they viewed the Congress leaders as landlords and moneylenders. For example, during the temperance campaign in 1887 and the food riots in Nagpur, Surendranath was targeted at his home because he was perceived as a moneylender and landlord. Research has also shown that the Congress was supported by industrialists and commercial magnates.

3.4.3 Phases of Moderate Politics

Between 1892 and 1904, Council reforms were not the major concern since some concessions had already been secured, and the Congress leaders were being elected to local and imperial legislatures. However, recurrent famines and the imposition of cotton excise duties led to an emphasis on economic concerns. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, in his speech on the 1901 budget, marked the first instance of economic critique of imperialism. Bipan Chandra noted that this drain of wealth served as the 'radicalising force' of nationalistic thought.



pamphlets translated into fewer than twelve languages, and he wrote an imaginary dialogue critiquing village administration.

However, the Congress's efforts to gain support were short-lived. The Aligarh Muslim elite feared Hindu dominance in the elected councils and competitive exams due to the advantage of English education for Hindus. The riots of 1893 further strengthened Muslim alienation and reduced the percentage of Muslim delegates in the Congress. Nevertheless, the Congress was not overly concerned about this, given the absence of a strong Muslim political organisation. No special efforts were made to encourage Muslim opinion after 1887-88. Hume's peasant strategy was abandoned due to official suspicion and hostility from officials such as Lt. Governor Auckland Colvin and Lord Dufferin. In 1887, Lord Dufferin openly criticised the Indian National Congress in a public address, mocking it as representing only "a microscopic minority of the people."

- Hume left for England in 1892, and before departing, he issued a circular predicting a peasant revolution unless the Congress became more energetic and the British more responsive. His warning was dismissed. In the 1890s, Congress activities became stagnant due to a lack of effective leadership, although Hume was still elected general secretary during this period. According to Sumit Sarkar, the failures in India over the years resulted in a shift in focus toward campaigning in England. This campaign was primarily carried out by the British Committee of the Congress, led by Wedderburn, Hume, and Naoroji, along with its journal, *India*.

Interest in the Congress waned in India, evidenced by increased local delegate representation and declining activity in regional bodies. In the early years of the twentieth century, the colonial government increasingly

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curtailed civil liberties. The Indian Official Secrets Act of 1904 imposed strict controls on the press, limiting free expression. These actions made it clear to Indians that instead of expanding political freedoms, the colonial authorities were systematically eroding the limited rights they already possessed. Lord Curzon's provocative activities gave rise to new leaders like Gokhale, who revived their efforts in the late 1890s.

The moderate phase of the Congress was often critiqued for its methods, style, and

functioning. Naoroji's concept of "un-British rule" aimed to convince liberal British opinion through petitions, speeches, and articles. For the Moderates, politics was largely a part-time activity. At this point, the Congress was not a political party but an annual three-day event. Local associations were small and inactive and occasionally met to 'elect' themselves. Consequently, the moderate phase was slow, followed a petition-based approach, and lacked consistent and organised political action.

Recap

- ◆ The moderate phase of the INC was from 1885 to 1905.
- ◆ During this phase, the Congress focused on moderate constitutional, economic, and administrative reforms.
- ◆ Political demands included the reform of the Legislative Council and increased Indian representation in local bodies, universities, and commerce.
- ◆ Administrative demands included the Indianisation of administrative services, separation of judiciary, trial by jury, repeal of the Arms Act, and higher jobs for Indians in the Army.
- ◆ Figures such as Dadabhai Naoroji, M.G. Ranade, and R.C. Dutt provided economic critiques of colonialism.
- ◆ Naoroji's Drain Theory argues that British policies drained the wealth of India through home charges, military expenses, and high land revenue demands.
- ◆ Thinkers like John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke, and John Morley shaped moderate ideas.
- ◆ Moderates viewed British rule as a force for modernisation.
- ◆ There was opposition from the Muslim elites.
- ◆ There were three phases of moderate politics: the first from 1885-1892, the second from 1892-1904, and the last from 1904-1905.
- ◆ Criticism of the moderates includes a lack of mass participation, slow progress, and an elitist approach.

Objective Questions

1. When was the Indian National Congress founded?
2. Who proposed the Drain Theory?
3. What was the method of agitation used by the moderates?
4. What was one of the administrative demands of the moderates?
5. Which leader among the moderates became more radical over time?
6. Which Act did the moderates demand to repeal?
7. Which British official dismissed the Indianisation of services, citing a lack of institutions?
8. When did Dadabhai Naoroji first mention the Drain of Wealth theory?
9. Which Act was introduced to win peasant support in 1901?
10. Who denounced the Congress as a 'microscopic minority' in 1888?

Answers

1. 1885
2. Dadabhai Naoroji
3. Petitions and persuasion
4. Indianisation of services
5. Dadabhai Naoroji
6. Arms Act
7. Charles Wood
8. 1867
9. Punjab Land Alienation Act
10. Lord Dufferin

Assignments

1. Discuss the contributions and limitations of moderate politics.
2. What was the impact of the moderate phase on later nationalist movements?
3. How did Congress attempt to involve peasants and Muslims in the nationalist struggle?
4. Discuss the political and economic ideas of the Moderates.
5. Trace the growth of political consciousness in India during the Moderate period.

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BLOCK

Nationalist Movement-Pre Gandhian Phase



UNIT

Growth of Radical Nationalism

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify the factors that led to the emergence of militant nationalism in India
- ◆ examine the formation and role of early revolutionary movements and secret societies in Maharashtra and Bengal
- ◆ discuss how the extremist phase redefined India's freedom struggle and laid the foundation for future national movements

Prerequisite

The study of radical nationalism in India requires an appreciation of the complex political, socio-economic, and intellectual transformations that characterised the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An understanding of the growing disillusionment with the moderate phase of the national movement is essential, as colonial rule increasingly revealed its exploitative and coercive character through recurrent famines, epidemics, economic stagnation, and discriminatory legislation. The emergence of a new sense of self-respect and pride in India's heritage can be understood through an examination of the political awakening of the educated middle classes and the currents of religious and cultural revivalism articulated by thinkers such as Swami Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Attention must also be paid to the ideological shift led by assertive nationalist leaders, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai, who repudiated faith in imperial benevolence and advocated swaraj through direct action

and popular mobilisation. Familiarity with the repressive policies of the colonial state, notably Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal, and the parallel rise of secret revolutionary organisations, from Wasudeo Balwant Phadke's early resistance to the Anusilan Samiti, will enable one to situate radical nationalism within both overt and clandestine modes of struggle. Finally, an awareness of contemporary international developments, particularly anti-imperialist movements and Japan's victory over Russia, is necessary to understand how global currents reinforced the conviction that colonial domination could be challenged and overthrown.

Keywords

Nationalism, Extremism, Revolution, Colonialism, Swadeshi, Militant Nationalism, Self-reliance, Ideology

Discussion

The rise of militant nationalism in India emerged in the 1890s and gained momentum by 1905, marking the beginning of a revolutionary approach alongside the broader national movement. This radical trend emerged as politically conscious Indians became disillusioned with the inability of the British government to address Indian demands. Economic hardships of the 1890s, including famines that killed millions and widespread outbreaks of plague, exposed the exploitative nature of colonial rule. Repressive policies, such as the Indian Councils Act of 1892, deportations of political activists, the expansion of sedition laws, reduction of Indian representation in municipal bodies, and restrictions on press and education, further fuelled dissatisfaction. The cumulative impact of these measures revealed to Indians that British rule was neither just nor progressive, socially or culturally.

By the early 20th century, a distinct school of militant thought had emerged, represented by leaders such as Raj Narain Bose, Ashwini Kumar Dutta, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal;

Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar and Tilak in Maharashtra; and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab. This school advocated direct political action, with swaraj as the ultimate goal, hatred of foreign rule, a belief in the masses' ability to challenge authority, and a readiness for personal sacrifice. Tilak, in particular, exemplified these principles, asserting that India could achieve independence through organised struggle, drawing inspiration from international events and the successes of nations like Japan.

4.1.1 Growth of Militant Nationalism

The closing years of the 19th century were marked by deep unrest and awakening in India. Amidst the fear caused by the bubonic plague and communal riots, a surge of religious revivalism swept across the country. This revival stirred pride in India's cultural past and strengthened self-respect among its people. Meanwhile, internationally, the British Empire's dominance was being tested by emerging powers like the United States, Germany, and Japan. The industrial rise of these nations and Japan's victory over Russia

revealed the shifting balance of power in the world and signalled the dawn of Asian resurgence.

By the end of the 19th century, the failure of moderate politics within the Indian National Congress gave rise to the “Extremist” trend. Moderates were criticised for compromise, their approach dubbed the “politics of mendicancy.” Extremism emerged most prominently under Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra, and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab, while other regions saw weaker influence. Historians cite multiple causes for this shift, including factionalism within Congress and wider society, such as disputes within the Brahmo Samaj, newspaper rivalries in Bengal, and factional struggles in Maharashtra, Madras, and Punjab. Yet the primary cause was frustration with the ineffectiveness of moderate politics: unfulfilled demands, an undemocratic Congress structure, financial weakness, and conflicts over social reform led many to question the moderates’ methods.

4.1.1.1 Reasons for the Rise of Radical Nationalism

1. Lord Curzon’s Policies

The aggressive policies of Lord Curzon (1899–1905) further fuelled nationalist anger. Measures such as the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act (1899), the Indian Universities Act (1904), restrictions on the press under the Official Secrets Amendment Act (1904), and the controversial partition of Bengal (1905) alienated educated Indians and intensified calls for more direct confrontation with colonial rule. Extremist leaders sought swaraj, or self-rule, but interpreted it differently: Tilak envisioned administrative control while retaining ties with Britain, whereas Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh demanded full political independence. At the turn of the 20th century, Lord Curzon’s

assessment that the Congress was “tottering to its fall” proved wildly inaccurate, largely because the Moderate Congress represented only a narrow segment of nationalist sentiment. Rising British unpopularity, driven by famines, plagues, excise policies, and Curzon’s aggressive administrative measures, combined with the rapid expansion of vernacular newspapers, created fertile ground for the rise of Extremism.

2. Ideological Transformation

The dissatisfaction with moderate methods also played a significant role in fostering militant nationalism. Younger leaders criticised the Congress’s reliance on peaceful and constitutional methods - prayer, petition, and protest - which they dismissed as “political mendicancy.” The strategies of the extremists changed over time; they moved from petitions and speeches to passive resistance, boycotts of British goods and institutions, promotion of swadeshi, and national education initiatives. Ideologically, they drew inspiration from regional literature, cultural revivalism, and reconstructed historical narratives to evoke nationalist pride. Heroes from India’s past - Shivaji, Ranjit Singh, and others were celebrated to instil courage and assert a martial and political identity.

This emphasis on indigenous cultural and historical identity, framed as political Hinduism, provided both an ideological base and a mobilising tool for the masses. Unlike moderates, who sought a Westernised modern path, extremists advocated a distinctly Indian framework for nationhood, merging political, cultural, and religious revival. The divergence of vision ultimately led to the split of Congress at Surat in 1907, formalising the divide between moderates and extremists. Simultaneously, Indian intellectuals such as Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and Swami Dayananda Saraswati



provided moral and cultural inspiration, asserting the richness of India's past and countering notions of Western superiority.

3. Critique of Moderate Politics

The Extremist critique targeted the Moderate Congress's "mendicant" methods of appealing to British opinion, seen as both futile and dishonourable, and criticised its alienation from the masses. Instead, Extremists emphasised self-reliance, constructive work, and mass mobilisation through swadeshi enterprises, national education, and the use of vernacular languages. Traditional institutions and cultural practices, such as village fairs or *melas*, combined with Hindu revivalist sentiments, were promoted as means to bridge the gap between the elite and the common people. These approaches foreshadowed three main trends that became distinct after 1905: non-political self-development through constructive work, political extremism seeking mass mobilisation via passive resistance, and militant nationalism aiming at direct action through violence.

4. Intellectual Foundations of Extremism

The intellectual groundwork for extremism was laid by figures such as Aurobindo Ghosh, who, in 1893–94, through his *New Lamps for Old* essays, rejected Moderate constitutionalism and urged a connection between the Congress's middle-class base and the "proletariat" of ordinary people. Although the mass connection initially eluded him, he experimented with secret societies and planned mass passive resistance, anticipating later possibilities during the anti-Partition upsurge. Disillusionment with the Congress also found expression in Bengal through personalities like Aswini Kumar Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore, who promoted swadeshi enterprises, national education, and cultural nationalism to create

broader public engagement. Similarly, in Punjab, leaders like Harkishan Lal and Arya Samajists encouraged industrial self-help and technical education, while figures like Lajpat Rai called for a Congress rooted in Hindu unity.

Sumit Sarkar observed that historians of the "Cambridge school" have, in recent years, sought to portray the rise of extremist dissent largely as a series of factional struggles between "ins" and "outs" competing for control of the Congress. Throughout the 1890s, Congress politics were marked by deep and recurring factional disputes across different regions, with divisions arising less from coherent ideological disagreements than from personal antagonisms and struggles for organisational dominance. In Bengal, rivalry existed between Surendranath Banerjea's *Indian Association* and Motilal Ghosh's *Amrita Bazar Patrika* group. Punjab witnessed sharp divisions among reform organisations and leaders, including splits within the Lahore Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj, as well as a personal rivalry between Lala Harkishan Lal and Lala Lajpat Rai. In Madras, politics was shaped by competing elite groups, the dominant 'Mylapore clique,' their 'Egmore' rivals, and leaders from the provinces who had been sidelined, whose shifting alliances later contributed to the rise of extremism after 1905. Similarly, in Poona, early conflicts involving Tilak, Agarkar, and Gokhale were driven more by control over institutions, particularly the Deccan Education Society, than by ideological differences.

5. Bal Gangadhar Tilak: The Pioneer of Extremism

Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra became the foremost pioneer of extremism, blending religion, history, and patriotic mobilisation. Through initiatives like the Ganapati festival (from 1894) and the

Shivaji festival (from 1896), Tilak connected nationalism with mass participation and experimented with early forms of boycott and civil disobedience, such as resistance to the cotton excise in 1896. His speeches in the early 1900s urged the masses to recognise their power in controlling administrative functions like railways, telegraphs, and revenue collection, foreshadowing techniques of passive resistance. Before mass mobilisation became fully viable, the immediate reaction against moderate politics often manifested as militant nationalism, exemplified by the assassination of plague officers Rand and Ayerst in Poona in 1897 by the Chapekar brothers. Although Tilak was imprisoned for two years, the incident highlighted the growing tension between colonial authority and nationalist assertion, with civil rights and a free press emerging as key issues.

Despite a temporary decline in political activity in Maharashtra after Tilak's imprisonment, nationalist energy in Bengal, Punjab, and elsewhere continued to build, culminating in the widespread resurgence following Curzon's controversial Partition of Bengal in 1905, which ushered in a new and more radical phase of India's struggle for independence.

6. Growing Self-Confidence and Political Awareness

Alongside growing discontent, the emergence of self-confidence and faith in Indian capabilities became a key factor in the rise of militant nationalism. Leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Bipin Chandra Pal emphasised self-reliance and the active involvement of the masses, arguing that ordinary Indians were capable of making the sacrifices necessary for national freedom. The expansion of education also contributed to heightened political awareness, as rising unemployment and underemployment among the educated

highlighted the structural weaknesses of the colonial economy. These conditions combined to produce a politically conscious and radicalised youth, eager to challenge imperial authority.

7. International Inspirations

International developments inspired Indian nationalists by demonstrating that non-European nations could resist and defeat colonial powers. Japan's rapid industrialisation after 1868, its victory over Russia in 1905, and other examples such as Ethiopia's defeat of Italy and the Boer Wars shattered the myth of European invincibility. Revolutionary movements worldwide in Ireland, Russia, Egypt, Turkey, Persia, and China reinforced the belief that a united, committed populace could confront and defeat the mightiest empires.

8. Emergence of New Leadership

The emergence of a trained and motivated leadership enabled the mass political energy to be channelled effectively. The swadeshi agitation during the movement against the partition of Bengal provided the first major opportunity for militant nationalists to put their ideology into practice, mobilising the masses in a coordinated and strategic manner. This era laid the foundation for the systematic growth of militant nationalism, combining ideological conviction, mass participation, and leadership capable of translating public discontent into sustained political action.

4.1.2 Revolutionary Resurgence in Maharashtra

After nearly two decades of inactivity following Phadke's arrest, militant nationalism resurfaced in Maharashtra toward the end of the 19th century, driven by intensifying anti-British sentiment. Public festivals like Ganapati and Shivaji became platforms for spreading revolutionary messages, urging



Hindus to challenge colonial rule. Central to this revival were the Chapekar brothers, Damodar and Balakrishna, who organised a society for physical and military training and inspired patriotic zeal through stirring verses celebrating courage and resistance. Their assassination of British officers in 1897, though partly accidental, was a direct response to oppressive colonial policies and demonstrated the enduring influence of Phadke's legacy.

Simultaneously, secret societies led by Rajput nobles and Maratha politicians sought to influence the Indian army, though little is known of their specific actions. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar emerged as a key revolutionary figure in Maharashtra, motivated by early communal riots and the martyrdom of the Chapekars. In 1900, he founded Mitra Mela in Nasik, later renamed Abhinava Bharata in Poona, modelled on Mazzini's Young Italy. These organisations trained youth, promoted patriotic values, and prepared them for armed struggle, producing a generation of poets, propagandists, and dedicated revolutionaries committed to India's independence.

Further revolutionary activity was spearheaded by the Arya Bandhav Samaj, established by P. S. Khankhoje and his associates in Wardha, inspired by Tilak and the example of the Chapekars. The Samaj conducted secret military drills, guerrilla warfare training, and plans to mobilise tribal groups while maintaining connections with revolutionary networks in Bengal, Punjab, and Hyderabad. Members were rigorously trained in strategy, discipline, and communication, with some sent abroad for advanced military education. The Samaj played a crucial role in creating a coordinated network of secret societies across India, with Tilak revered as the central guiding figure for revolutionary youth.

4.1.3 Bengal

The revolutionary movement in Bengal took shape in the early 20th century, led by individuals such as Pramatha Mitra, a barrister who had made several earlier attempts to establish secret societies. The movement gained significant momentum with the creation of the 'Anusilan Samiti', inspired by Swami Vivekananda's teachings on patriotism, physical fitness, and self-sacrifice. Under the guidance of Sister Nivedita and Aurobindo Ghose, Satish Chandra Basu and other young activists set up clubs for gymnastics, lathi-play, and military drills, which served as a cover for revolutionary training. The Samiti was officially inaugurated on 24 March 1902, with P. Mitra as its leader, aiming to nurture both physical strength and nationalist consciousness among Bengal's youth.

The Anusilan Samiti evolved by bringing together smaller groups, including the Gymnastic Club at Madan Mitra's Lane and Jatindra Nath Bandyopadhyay's Circular Road Club. These organisations focused on physical conditioning, military drills, and lessons on revolutionary movements abroad, producing a disciplined generation ready for nationalist action. Jatindra Nath, sent from Baroda by Aurobindo Ghose, played a central role in organising and uniting these groups. Although the Samiti initially concentrated on training and patriotic education, a few members resorted to political dacoities to fund their activities, a practice that P. Mitra did not endorse.

The Anusilan Samiti became the core of Bengal's revolutionary network, consolidating smaller societies and acting as a training ground for young revolutionaries. Through a combination of physical training, nationalist instruction, and support from sympathetic leaders like Surendra Nath Banerji, the Samiti laid the groundwork for a structured approach to militant nationalism

in Bengal. Leaders such as Jatindra Nath Bandyopadhyay, Aurobindo Ghose, and P. Mitra ensured that the organisation balanced discipline, ideological guidance, and practical preparation for India's broader struggle for independence.

In the early 20th century, Bengal's revolutionary movement revolved around the Anusilan Samiti, composed mainly of young students trained in military drills, sword-play, boxing, wrestling, and patriotic values. Guidance in moral and nationalist principles came from prominent figures such as Rabindranath Tagore, Gurudas Banerji, and B.C. Pal, while weapons were sometimes revered as symbols of resistance. Multiple branches and independent secret societies operated alongside the Samiti.

Aurobindo Ghose born in 1872 and educated in England under an anglicised upbringing, emerged as a central figure. Early exposure to accounts of British exploitation shaped his nationalist resolve. He delivered revolutionary speeches in England, returned to India in 1893, contributed nationalist writings, and committed himself to organising a

clandestine revolutionary network. Before 1902, he established a society in Bengal, initiating members, including his brother Barindra, through solemn vows to dedicate their lives to India's freedom. Collaborating with Jatindra Nath Bandyopadhyay, Arabindo united various clubs and established branches in Calcutta, bringing secret societies under a coordinated programme. Despite internal conflicts and local indifference, he worked discreetly, laying the foundations for future activism, which gained momentum during the Swadeshi movement.

Foreign influences also shaped the movement. Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, guided revolutionary leaders. Japanese scholar Okakura stressed India's need for independence to join an anti-European Asian alliance, further inspiring nationalist sentiment. Together, these Indian and international influences, including physical training, moral guidance, literature, and revolutionary ideas, helped shape Bengal's early revolutionary movement and prepared it for organised militant activism.

Recap

- ◆ Militant nationalism emerged in India, fuelled by economic hardships and British oppression.
- ◆ Extremists criticised moderates, demanding direct action, swaraj, and mass mobilisation.
- ◆ Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai led early radical thought.
- ◆ Religious revivalism and pride in India's past strengthened nationalist sentiment.
- ◆ Curzon's policies, including the Bengal Partition, intensified anger against colonial administration.
- ◆ Extremists promoted swadeshi, national education, and cultural revival to inspire the masses.



- ◆ Early revolutionary societies, like Phadke's, pioneered armed resistance and secret organisation.
- ◆ Maharashtra witnessed a resurgence through the Chapekar brothers and Tilak-inspired mass festivals.
- ◆ Bengal's Anusilan Samiti trained youth in physical, military, and nationalist discipline.
- ◆ International examples, educated leadership, and self-confidence contributed to India's radical nationalist growth.

Objective Questions

1. Name two leaders associated with militant nationalism in Bengal.
2. Which leader in Maharashtra became the foremost pioneer of Extremism?
3. What was the primary goal of extremist leaders like Tilak and Pal?
4. Which British Viceroy's policies intensified nationalist anger between 1899 and 1905?
5. Mention one controversial policy of Lord Curzon that fuelled Extremism.
6. Who is considered the father of militant nationalism in India?
7. What revolutionary society in Bengal was inspired by Swami Vivekananda?
8. Name one event organised by Tilak to mobilise the masses in Maharashtra.
9. Which international victory inspired Indian nationalists in the early 20th century?
10. What were the three main trends of Extremism after 1905?

Answers

1. Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal
2. Bal Gangadhar Tilak
3. Swaraj (self-rule) and full political independence

4. Lord Curzon
5. Partition of Bengal in 1905
6. Wasudeo Balwant Phadke
7. Anushilan Samiti
8. Ganapati festival (from 1894) / Shivaji festival (from 1896)
9. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905
10. a. Non-political self-development, b. Political Extremism via mass mobilisation, c. Militant nationalism for direct action

Assignments

1. Analyse the socio-economic and political factors in the late 19th century that contributed to the rise of militant nationalism in India.
2. Discuss the role of leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghosh in shaping the ideology and strategies of the Extremist movement.
3. Explain how international developments and examples influenced the Indian revolutionary movement in the early 20th century.
4. Describe the contributions of Wasudeo Balwant Phadke and the Chapekar brothers in laying the foundations of revolutionary nationalism in Maharashtra.
5. Examine the formation and activities of the Anusilan Samiti in Bengal, highlighting its role in training young revolutionaries and consolidating secret societies.

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UNIT

Partition of Bengal

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the political, administrative, and ideological causes behind the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and its significance within colonial governance
- ◆ analyse the Swadeshi Movement as a mass movement, focusing on its strategies of mobilisation, use of cultural symbols, and socio economic impact
- ◆ examine the emergence of extremist and revolutionary strands of nationalism during the Swadeshi phase and their relationship with moderate politics
- ◆ assess the shift from petition based protest to organised and participatory political activism in the early twentieth century

Prerequisite

To understand the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement, a basic knowledge of British rule in India and the early growth of Indian nationalism is essential. It is important to be familiar with the role of the Indian National Congress and the limitations of moderate politics based on petitions and appeals. An awareness of Lord Curzon's policies, especially the Partition of Bengal in 1905, is necessary to understand why it created widespread anger among Indians. Familiarity with the concepts of swadeshi and boycott helps explain how these ideas encouraged people to support Indian goods, reject foreign products, and

take part in mass movements. A general understanding of how political protest expanded into economic, cultural, and social activities during this period highlights why the Swadeshi Movement marked an important turning point in India's freedom struggle.

Keywords

Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement, Boycott, Foreign Goods, Self-Reliance, Extremists, Moderates, Divide and Rule, Economic Nationalism, Cultural Nationalism, Mass Mobilisation, Contemporary Nationalism

Discussion

4.2.1 Partition of Bengal (1905)



Map: Partition of Bengal 1905 (Source: Hindustan Times)

The Partition of Bengal in 1905, widely regarded as Lord Curzon's most controversial act, sparked intense debate among historians. Official justifications emphasised administrative convenience, citing the unwieldy size of the Bengal Presidency and the need to develop Assam as a viable province. Proposals for territorial adjustments had surfaced as early as the 1860s, with Assam and Sylhet being separated in 1874 and further adjustments suggested in the 1890s. Curzon and his officials, particularly

Lt. Governor Andrew Fraser and H.H. Risley, framed the creation of a new province, "East Bengal and Assam," as a measure to ease administration, promote development, and provide opportunities for British officials and industrialists, particularly in the tea, oil, and coal industries.

However, beyond these administrative arguments, evidence suggests clear political motives. The main political motive behind the Partition at this time was to create divisions among the largely Hindu political leadership

of West and East Bengal. British officials clearly recognized that a united Bengal had become politically powerful, and therefore believed that dividing it would weaken nationalist opposition. Home Secretary H.H. Risley openly admitted in official notes of 1904 that one of the chief aims of the scheme was to split and weaken a strong body of critics challenging British rule.

The reaction to Partition was swift and intense. It catalysed a broader and more militant nationalist movement, transcending traditional petitioning and debates. Bengal's cultural and intellectual unity, fostered by its educated *bhadralok*, newspapers, modern literature, and leaders like Rabindranath Tagore, made the province particularly resistant to British attempts at division. International developments, such as British setbacks in the Boer War, Japan's victory over Russia, and global anti-colonial movements, further fuelled pride and confidence among Indians. The educated Bengali elite's growing awareness of racial discrimination, economic grievances, and social inequalities amplified the perception of Partition as a national insult.

Economic factors also contributed to unrest. Rising prices between 1904 and 1908, overcrowding in liberal professions, and dependence on tenuous agrarian tenures created economic strain among the *bhadralok* and intermediate landholders. While the Extremist intelligentsia often failed to connect nationalist rhetoric with peasant grievances, economic discontent among sections of the peasantry and labour, stimulated by inflation, rising prices, and strikes, added depth to the Swadeshi movement. At the same time, British legislative reforms and temporary economic gains for some cultivators slightly mitigated rural discontent, preventing a full-scale agrarian uprising during the Extremist phase of nationalism.

The Swadeshi Movement represented

a significant milestone in India's national struggle, actively engaging women, students, and broad segments of both urban and rural populations in Bengal and beyond. This period witnessed the emergence of almost every major political trend, from moderate conservatism to radical extremism, early socialist ideas, petitioning, public oratory, passive resistance, and boycott. Its impact went far beyond politics, inspiring advances in art, literature, music, science, and industry, as Indian society explored new avenues of creativity and experimentation across all fields.

The Swadeshi Movement emerged as a response to the British decision to partition Bengal, an action officially justified by the region's large population of 78 million but largely driven by political motives. The British sought to weaken the growing nationalist movement by undermining Bengal, then seen as the nerve centre of Indian nationalism. Lord Curzon explicitly aimed to "dethrone Calcutta" as the centre of Congress influence, while Home Secretary Risley admitted that dividing Bengal would split and weaken opponents to British rule. The plan provoked immediate outrage in Bengal, but Curzon insisted on pressing ahead to prevent the consolidation of nationalist forces.

The partition sought to marginalise Bengalis within Bengal proper by placing them under two administrations and reducing their majority. It also aimed to foster religious divisions by strengthening Muslim communalists against the national movement, with Dacca positioned as the capital of a Muslim-majority province. Even Curzon's successor, Lord Minto, though critical of the method, acknowledged the political utility of partition. Indian nationalists, however, recognised the underlying strategy and condemned it, giving rise to the anti-partition



agitation that evolved into the Swadeshi Movement.

4.2.2 Anti-Partition Agitation

Bipan Chandran noted that in December 1903, the proposed partition of Bengal became public, triggering an immediate and widespread protest. Within two months, around 500 protest meetings were held across East Bengal, particularly in Dacca, Mymensingh, and Chittagong, and nearly fifty thousand pamphlets critically analysing the proposals were circulated. Leaders such as Surendranath Banerjee, Krishna Kumar Mitra, and Prithwishchandra Ray spearheaded a vigorous press campaign through newspapers like *The Bengalee*, *Hitabadi*, and *Sanjibani*. Large public meetings took place in Calcutta in March 1904 and January 1905, and sixty-nine petitions from the Dacca division alone, some signed by as many as 70,000 people, were submitted to the Government of India and the Secretary of State. Even loyal zamindars joined forces with Congress leaders, including intellectuals and professionals from journalism and law.

From 1903 to mid-1905, moderate methods dominated the anti-partition campaign, relying on petitions, speeches, public meetings, and press advocacy. The aim was to shape public opinion in India and England and present a strong case against the partition, hoping to generate enough pressure to prevent this perceived injustice.

The announcement of the partition of Bengal on 19 July 1905, despite widespread protests, demonstrated to nationalists that moderate methods were insufficient and that a more assertive strategy was needed. Spontaneous protest meetings erupted across mofussil towns like Dinajpur, Pabna, Faridpur, Tangail, Jessore, Dacca, Birbhum, and Barisal, where the first pledges to boycott foreign goods were taken. In Calcutta, students organised meetings opposing the

partition and promoting Swadeshi. The formal launch of the Swadeshi Movement occurred on 7 August 1905 at Calcutta Town Hall, with the passing of the Boycott Resolution, which gave direction and leadership to the previously sporadic protests. Even moderate leaders, including Surendranath Banerjea, actively promoted the boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt.

The government announced that the partition would take effect on 16 October 1905. In the weeks leading up to this date, mass protests erupted throughout Bengal, some attracting crowds of 10,000 to 12,000, and British cloth sales in certain districts fell drastically. On 16 October, Bengal observed a day of mourning: people fasted, refrained from lighting fires, held processions, and sang *Vande Mataram*, which became the movement's anthem. Symbols of unity, such as tying *rakhis*, were widely adopted, and mass meetings addressed by Anandamohan Bose and Surendranath Banerjea drew 50,000 to 75,000 participants, raising Rs. 50,000 for the cause. Maulvi Abdul Rasul, a leader of anti-partition movement later remarked that the Swadeshi Movement, which arose from the "disaster" of Bengal's partition, achieved in six months what could not have been accomplished in decades.

4.2.2.1 The Swadeshi and Boycott Movements

The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1908) marked a decisive shift in India's struggle against British rule, triggered by the announcement of the Partition of Bengal. Until mid-1905, opposition relied largely on conventional Moderate methods such as press campaigns, petitions, and large conferences, notably at the Calcutta Town Hall in March 1904 and January 1905. These measures, especially in districts like Dacca and Mymensingh, proved largely ineffective, prompting leaders to explore more active and symbolic forms of resistance. The boycott

of British goods emerged as a key strategy, first suggested by Krishnakumar Mitra in *Sanjivan* (July 1905) and later embraced by established leaders like Surendranath Banerjee after initial hesitation. Cultural and symbolic expressions also played a role: Rabindranath Tagore and Ramendrasunder Trivedi promoted the exchange of *rakhi-bandhan* wristlets on Partition Day and keeping hearths unlit as a sign of mourning, reinforcing solidarity and collective protest.

The Swadeshi and boycott initiatives quickly spread nationwide. Lokamanya Tilak mobilised support in Poona and Bombay; Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab and northern India; Syed Haidar Raza in Delhi, Rawalpindi, Kangra, Jammu, Multan, and Hardwar; and Chidambaram Pillai in the Madras presidency, bolstered by Bipin Chandra Pal's lecture tours. The Indian National Congress supported the movement, with the Banaras Session of 1905 under G.K. Gokhale endorsing Swadeshi and boycotts in Bengal. Militant nationalists like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai, and Aurobindo Ghose advocated for the expansion of the movement into a nationwide political struggle for Swaraj, surpassing the limited goal of reversing the partition.

The movement faced severe repression, particularly targeting student activists through measures like the Carlyle Circular of October 1905, which threatened the withdrawal of grants, scholarships, and affiliations from nationalist-dominated institutions. This led to boycotts of official educational institutions and the establishment of national schools, significantly supported by Subodh Mullik's generous donation of Rupees one lakh in November 1905. Escalating tensions followed with further crackdowns, including the deployment of Gurkhas in Barisal, the forceful dispersal of provincial conferences, and legal actions against Swadeshi activists.

Internal divisions soon emerged within the

movement, reflecting differences in strategy and ultimate objectives. Aurobindo Ghosh, by April 1907, viewed the boycott as the starting point for broader revolutionary aims, seeking 'Swaraj' or complete independence, with the reversal of Partition seen as a minor objective. Others, such as Surendranath Banerjee, treated the boycott as a pragmatic attempt to compel the British financially to revoke Partition. Established Moderate leaders eventually called off the educational boycott by November 1905 and sought to capitalise on Morley's liberal reputation as Secretary of State, returning to more conventional political methods.

The movement also reflected factional dynamics, with previously marginalised leaders - Motilal Ghosh (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*), Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghosh - challenging the dominance of established groups, particularly the lawyer-led political rings in district towns. However, reducing the era's history to a simple 'ins versus outs' struggle would overlook its broader significance. The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal combined political innovation, cultural symbolism, and mass mobilisation, laying the foundation for a more assertive and diversified nationalist struggle.

Between 1905 and 1908, Bengal's political landscape witnessed the emergence of three major trends alongside the established Moderates. The first was the "constructive Swadeshi" approach, which rejected passive, symbolic politics in favour of self-help through the promotion of Swadeshi industries, national schools, and village development. This was reflected in initiatives such as the business ventures of Prafullachandra Roy and Nilratan Sircar, Satischandra Mukherji's journal *Dawn* and the Dawn Society - which played a pivotal role in the national education movement - and Rabindranath Tagore, who, in his 1904 Swadeshi Samaj address, outlined a blueprint for village-level constructive



work through the revival of the traditional Hindu 'samaj' or community. Initiatives like Aswinikumar Dutt's Swadesh Bandhav Samiti, which mediated hundreds of village disputes, and the reported functioning of nearly a thousand village samitis, demonstrated a practical commitment to grassroots reform, anticipating Gandhian programmes of constructive work and self-reliance.

In contrast, the more politically restless youth were drawn to Extremist methods, emphasising direct struggle for Swaraj. Journals like Bipin Chandra Pal's *New India*, Aurobindo Ghose's *Vande Mataram*, and *Yugantar* articulated a vision that combined boycott, civil disobedience, and even armed resistance with the constructive elements of Swadeshi industry and education. While some leaders, such as Tilak, were willing to compromise temporarily, figures like Aurobindo called for organised, relentless opposition to British authority and the social boycott of loyalists, proposing measures that foreshadowed Gandhian civil disobedience but without the principle of non-violence. Extremist activity often centred on literary and rhetorical attacks, internal Congress disputes, and the creation of local samitis, which provided new forms of political leadership and mobilised labour unrest.

Alongside debates over methods, cultural and religious controversies shaped the Swadeshi era. Many leaders fused politics with Hindu revivalism, using Swadeshi vows, nationalist education, caste sanctions, and festivals such as the Shivaji festival to energise supporters. Journals like *Vande Mataram*, *Sandhya*, and *Yugantar* intertwined radical politics with religious sentiment, while other voices, including Brahmo-edited journals like *Sanjivani* and *Prabasi*, Krishmikumar Mitra's *Anti-Circular Society*, and even some revolutionaries, critiqued this religiosity and emphasised secular patriotism. Tagore himself, initially influenced by revivalist

trends, broke away after communal tensions, exploring the complexities of the era in his novels *Gora* (1907–09) and *Ghare-Baire* (1914).

A central theme of the Swadeshi Movement was self-reliance (*Atmasakti*), encompassing national dignity, social reform, economic regeneration, and constructive village work. Campaigns addressed social evils such as caste oppression, early marriage, dowry, and alcohol consumption. Education was emphasised through national schools and colleges, exemplified by Bengal National College under Aurobindo, and the National Council of Education aimed to provide education on national lines in vernacular languages. Technical institutions and scholarships for study abroad supported this vision. Self-reliance extended to indigenous enterprise, with the establishment of Swadeshi textile mills, factories, banks, insurance companies, and shops. While some ventures failed, others, like Acharya P.C. Ray's Bengal Chemicals, succeeded and became renowned.

Culturally, the Swadeshi Movement had a profound impact. Nationalist songs by Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Ray, and others inspired diverse political groups. Tagore's *Amar Sonar Bangla* later became Bangladesh's national anthem. Folk music (*Palligeet* and *Jari Gan*) and literary works like *Thakurmar Jhuli* nurtured popular engagement. In art, figures like Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose revived indigenous traditions against Victorian styles, while in science, pioneers such as Jagdish Chandra Bose and Prafulla Chandra Ray achieved international recognition.

Despite the promise of constructive work and mass mobilisation, by 1908 Bengal politics had polarised between moderate passivity and individual extremism. British repression alone cannot fully explain this shift, as prosecutions were limited and relatively

light. The deeper factors lay in the limitations of the movement's key components—boycott and Swadeshi efforts, national education, labour organisation, local samitis, and methods of mass engagement—highlighting both the strengths and vulnerabilities of early nationalist experimentation in Bengal.

The Swadeshi and boycott movements in Bengal illustrated both the potential and the limitations of a nationalist effort largely driven by an educated middle class without substantial support from the wider bourgeoisie. The boycott initially achieved measurable success: imports of cotton goods, salt, shoes, and cigarettes fell significantly in 1905–1906. However, much of this decline was linked to trade disputes, local merchant interests, or the limited ability of Indian industries, particularly in Bombay, to supply alternatives. Swadeshi did revive traditional crafts like handloom and silk weaving, reflecting a near-Gandhian ideal of small-scale, artisanal production. Some efforts to promote modern industries, such as cotton mills, technical training abroad, and ventures in porcelain, soap, and matches were launched, but a lack of capital and minimal support from the established business class constrained their impact.

In education, Swadeshi initiatives emphasised vernacular instruction, technical training, and the blending of traditional and modern knowledge. Notable efforts included Tagore's Santiniketan, Satishchandra Mukherji's Dawn Society, and the Bengal National College. However, limited job prospects prevented widespread student participation, and most mass-oriented schools in East Bengal eventually declined. Some district schools, however, became recruitment centres for revolutionaries, the most prominent being Sonarang National School near Dacca.

Labour unrest also characterised this

period, as rising prices, racial insults, and nationalist agitation led to strikes in jute mills, railway workshops, and clerical offices. Early labour leaders like Aswinikumar Banerji, Prabhatkumsum Roychaudhuri, Athanasius Apurbakumar Ghosh, and Premtosh Bose helped organise unions, though their reach was largely confined to clerks and Bengali mill workers. Strikes often failed to sustain themselves, and the movement's impact remained limited, with nationalists losing interest after 1908.

The Swadeshi Movement significantly broadened the social base of Indian nationalism, bringing large sections of society into active political participation and exposing even wider groups to modern political ideas. It engaged zamindars, the lower middle class, students, and, notably, women, who joined processions and picketing for the first time. Efforts were also made to address the economic grievances of the working class, with strikes organised in foreign-managed enterprises such as the Eastern Indian Railway and Clive Jute Mills, influenced in part by international socialist currents.

While the movement struggled to mobilise the peasantry extensively, except in pockets like Barisal, the involvement of peasants marked the early stages of modern mass politics in India. Even where peasants did not actively participate in boycott or passive resistance, they were introduced to nationalist ideas through meetings, festivals (*jatras*), and constructive work. However, the movement failed to gain significant Muslim support, particularly from the peasantry, largely to British policies that exploited communal divisions. In Bengal, class divisions between Hindu landlords and Muslim peasants, coupled with the establishment of the All India Muslim League and the promotion of leaders like Nawab Salimullah, fostered opposition and led to communal riots.



The Swadeshi strategy of mobilising the masses through traditional festivals and cultural institutions, though effective initially, also had unintended consequences. Communalists, with state backing, misinterpreted these forms, emphasising narrow religious identities instead of the syncretic cultural traditions they actually represented. Despite these challenges, the movement laid the foundation for mass political mobilisation and the spread of modern nationalist consciousness across diverse social groups.

A major achievement of the Swadeshi era was the rise of *samitis* or national volunteer organisations. Initially open and active in social work, crafts, schools, arbitration, and spreading Swadeshi propaganda, many of these societies were concentrated in East Bengal, particularly in districts like Bakargunj, Dacca, Faridpur, and Mymensingh. While some *samitis*, like Swadesh Bandhav, developed mass bases and secular participation, others, like the Dacca Anushilan, focused on secretive physical training steeped in Hindu rituals. Over time, repression pushed open *samitis* toward secrecy and their peasant membership remained minimal.

The period also saw increasing Hindu-Muslim tensions, exacerbated by British divide-and-rule policies and rising Muslim separatism. Despite occasional displays of communal unity and the participation of sincere Muslim Swadeshi activists, propaganda and elite politics encouraged divisions. Riots in East Bengal, often with agrarian and economic dimensions, reinforced communal polarisation. Rabindranath Tagore highlighted that such unrest reflected a deeper social gap between educated elites and the masses, warning that militant nationalism without mass engagement was limited in scope. Consequently, extremist propaganda increasingly assumed aggressive Hindu tones and leaned towards militant nationalism, reflecting the practical reality

that revolutionary action largely depended on a motivated elite rather than broad popular participation.

By mid-1908, the mass-based Swadeshi Movement had largely lost momentum due to multiple factors. First, the government responded with severe repression, imposing restrictions on public meetings, processions, and the press, expelling student participants, barring them from government service, and using police violence, as seen during the Barisal Conference of 1906. Second, internal divisions, particularly the 1907 split in the Indian National Congress, weakened the movement, while much of India outside Bengal was not yet ready to adopt its methods. Between 1907 and 1908, key leaders like Tilak, Lajpat Rai, and Aurobindo Ghosh were imprisoned, deported, or retired, leaving the movement largely leaderless. Third, the movement lacked a structured organisation to coordinate its programmes, ranging from passive resistance and non-cooperation to social reform into a disciplined, nationwide strategy, a gap later addressed by Gandhi. Finally, mass movements naturally lose intensity over time, especially under harsh repression, requiring pauses for consolidation. Despite this decline, a new trend emerged: militant nationalism. The perceived stagnation of the movement, combined with state repression, prompted many young participants to adopt “individual heroism” in place of organised mass action.

4.2.3 Shift to Militant Nationalism(1902–1908)

The early revolutionary movement in India emerged around 1902 in Midnapur and Calcutta, led by figures such as Jnanendranath Basu, Promotha Mitra, and Aurobindo's associates. Initially, these groups focused on the physical and moral training of members and were not yet politically significant. By 1906–1908, however, more organised efforts began, including the publication of

the *Yugantar* weekly and failed assassination attempts, such as the plan against Lt. Governor Fuller. Hemchandra Kanungo travelled abroad for military and political training, returning in 1908 to help establish a bomb-making centre in Maniktala, Calcutta. Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki were arrested for attempting to assassinate Magistrate Kingsford. Around the same time, the well-organised Dhaka Anushilan group, led by Pulin Das, executed its first major dacoity in June 1908.

Militant Nationalism, despite its limited scope, left a lasting legacy in Bengal. It involved the assassinations of oppressive officials, Swadeshi dacoities to fund activities, and sporadic military conspiracies with foreign contacts. While it inspired admiration and heroism among educated youth, it did not translate into mass uprisings or widespread rural support. The movement's intense religiosity limited broader participation, especially among Muslims, and often prioritised martyrdom over systematic political strategy. Elite terrorism also delayed efforts to involve the general populace in active political struggle, leaving its social base largely among upper-caste Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Vaidyas.

4.2.3.1 Extremism Outside Bengal (1905 - 1908)

In regions outside Bengal, extremism had varied influence. In Bihar, Orissa, and Assam, local movements were shaped by educated Bengali dominance and demands for separate provinces, limiting radicalism. The United Provinces saw only minor extremist activity; leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya pursued moderate cooperation with government policies, promoting cultural and educational initiatives rather than direct confrontation. In Benares, however, revolutionary groups emerged among students and Bengalis, maintaining links with Calcutta.

In Punjab, early constructive Swadeshi work combined with Arya Samajist and Brahmo reformist activities. Extremism there, led by Lajpat Rai, Hans Raj, and Ajit Singh, grew briefly in response to British repression, including the Chenab Colonies Bill, land revenue hikes, and unfair prosecutions. Their activities included organising peasants, promoting non-payment of taxes, and strikes, though the movement declined after government crackdowns in 1907. Many radicals later turned to militant nationalism, including Ajit Singh and Har Dayal.

In the Madras Presidency, extremism gained ground in the Andhra delta and Tirunelveli districts, often due to local factional disputes. Leaders like G. Subramaniya Iyer, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, and Subramania Siva promoted Swadeshi, boycott, national education, and workers' rights, including strikes for better wages. Tuticorin saw the creation of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company, which provoked anti-British sentiment and worker mobilisation, though these radical initiatives were largely suppressed by British authorities by 1908.

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, Tilak's leadership energised extremism between 1905 and 1908 through radical journalism (*Kesari*), speeches, Swadeshi festivals, boycotts of foreign cloth, and the establishment of the *Swadeshi Vastri Pracharini Sabha*. Efforts were also made to engage the working class and encourage mass picketing of liquor shops. While industrialists provided limited support, the Swadeshi movement boosted profits for Bombay mills and facilitated large initiatives like Tata Iron and Steel. Tilak's trial in 1908 sparked massive strikes and riots among workers, though these protests were short-lived. After Tilak's imprisonment, extremist activity in Maharashtra largely

shifted to individual terrorist actions, such as the Nasik and Gwalior conspiracies led by the Abhinava Bharat and Nava Bharat groups.

4.2.4 Surat Split

Between 1905 and 1907, the Indian National Congress became the arena for growing tensions between Moderates and Extremists, culminating in the Surat Split of December 1907. While some historians describe Extremism as a nationwide coalition trying to reverse defeats, the Congress at the time was still largely a forum for annual deliberations rather than a formal political organisation. Extremists were strong in regional bases like Bengal, Punjab, and parts of Madras and Maharashtra, and efforts were made to strengthen the Congress through resolutions such as forming District Associations for sustained political work. Some Moderates, like Gokhale, sought to combine moral discipline with national service through initiatives like the Servants of India Society, but these had limited reach.

In the early stages, Extremist influence was relatively weak, as seen at the Banares session of 1905, where boycott measures were referenced cautiously, and Tilak and Lajpat challenged pro-British resolutions through

compromises rather than confrontation. By the 1906 Calcutta session, Extremists had gained strength and inter-provincial contacts, influencing resolutions on Boycott, Swadeshi, National Education, and Self-Government, though many terms were deliberately ambiguous. Efforts to extend boycott measures beyond Bengal were blocked by Moderates like Malaviya and Gokhale.

The 1907 Surat session marked the height of conflict. By controlling the presidency and session arrangements, Moderates ensured Rasbehari Ghosh's election, leading to chaos when Extremists attempted to adjourn proceedings. The clash, though violent, was provoked largely by Moderate intransigence, despite repeated efforts by Tilak, Lajpat, and their allies to reunite the Congress afterward. The subsequent Allahabad Convention (April 1908) formalised the split, defining Congress methods as strictly constitutional, reform-focused, and limiting delegate representation to recognised bodies, effectively excluding Extremists. A major reason for the Moderates' rigidity was their expectation of reforms under the Liberal government in Britain, with John Morley as Secretary of State, which shaped their cautious approach towards the nationalist struggle.

Recap

- ◆ Curzon's 1905 Bengal Partition was justified administratively but concealed deliberate political motives of division.
- ◆ The partition aimed to fragment Hindu unity, weaken Congress influence, and consolidate British imperial control.
- ◆ Immediate protests across Bengal ignited mass agitation, evolving into the Swadeshi and Boycott Movements.
- ◆ The Swadeshi Movement united women, students, workers, and elites in national political participation.

- ◆ Swadeshi emphasised self-reliance, indigenous industries, national education, and the revival of cultural traditions.
- ◆ Economic hardships, inflation, and professional overcrowding intensified nationalist sentiments and anti-British resistance.
- ◆ Repression, internal divisions, and a lack of coordination weakened Swadeshi momentum after 1908.
- ◆ Extremist and revolutionary activities arose, emphasising Swaraj, direct action, and individual heroism.
- ◆ Communal tensions deepened as the British exploited divisions, marginalising Muslim support in Bengal.
- ◆ Despite its decline, Swadeshi fostered modern nationalism, political awakening, and the foundation of mass movements.

Objective Questions

1. Who was the British officer primarily responsible for the Partition of Bengal in 1905?
2. Name the new provinces created after the partition.
3. Which British officials supported Curzon in planning the partition?
4. On which date did the Partition of Bengal officially come into effect?
5. Where and when was the Swadeshi Movement formally launched?
6. Which song became the anthem of the Swadeshi Movement?
7. Who proposed the boycott of British goods through his newspaper *Sanjivan* in July 1905?
8. Which circular targeted students participating in nationalist activities during the Swadeshi Movement?
9. Who among the following leaders represented the Extremist wing during the Swadeshi Movement?
10. What was the major consequence of the growing division between Moderates and Extremists in the Indian National Congress?

Answers

1. Lord Curzon
2. East Bengal and Assam
3. Lt. Governor Andrew Fraser and H. H. Risley
4. 16 October 1905
5. At Calcutta Town Hall on 7 August 1905
6. Vande Mataram
7. Krishnakumar Mitra
8. The Carlyle Circular of October 1905
9. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghosh
10. The Surat Split of December 1907

Assignments

1. Critically examine the administrative and political motives behind the Partition of Bengal (1905).
2. Discuss the emergence and development of the Swadeshi Movement as a response to the Partition of Bengal.
3. Evaluate the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal.
4. Analyse the ideological and strategic differences between the Moderates and Extremists during the Swadeshi era.
5. Assess the limitations and legacy of the Swadeshi and Boycott Movements (1905–1908).

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UNIT

Growth of Communalism

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain how the British used repression, limited concessions, and communal divisions to manage unrest and maintain their rule in India
- ◆ assess the significance of the Simla Deputation, the formation of the Muslim League, and the evolution of Muslim political consciousness
- ◆ analyse how the introduction of separate electorates encouraged communalism, created divisions among Indians, and influenced the course of early Indian nationalism

Prerequisite

The early twentieth century in India was marked by growing tension between British colonial authority and emerging nationalist aspirations. Following the Swadeshi and anti-Partition movements in Bengal, the colonial administration faced the dual challenge of controlling political unrest while accommodating demands for greater Indian participation in governance. The period witnessed the evolution of a systematic British approach that combined repression, selective concessions, and strategies of communal division to maintain imperial control. Amidst rising political consciousness, leaders across communities, both Hindu and Muslim, negotiated their positions within this constrained framework, giving rise to institutional reforms like the Minto -Morley Reforms of 1909. These measures, particularly the introduction of separate electorates, reflected both the colonial intent to fragment nationalist unity and the increasing assertiveness of elite Indian groups seeking political recognition. Simultaneously, the emergence of the Muslim League and

its evolving leadership demonstrated how communal identity and elite interests intersected with the broader struggle for political representation, setting the stage for subsequent debates over self-governance and Hindu-Muslim cooperation in the Indian freedom movement.

Keywords

Muslim League, Minto-Morley, Reforms, Simla Deputation, Political Consciousness, Communalism, Divide and Rule

Discussion

Historians often debate the origins of specific British policies in India, particularly regarding Secretary of State John Morley and Viceroy Lord Minto. However, as Sumit Sarkar notes, the central issue is less about individual authorship than the collaborative development of a consistent framework for managing political unrest in India. This framework relied on three pillars: repression, concessions to moderate elements, and divide-and-rule strategies, with separate electorates exemplifying the last.

After 1906, the British administration hesitated to apply repressive measures, given that educated Indians, unlike tribal insurgents, peasants, or labourers, valued civil liberties and the rule of law. Initial repression was implemented by Bampfylde Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam, who deployed Gurkhas in Barisal, banned the use of the *Vande Mataram* slogan, and sought to disaffiliate schools engaged in political activities. Morley and Minto, concerned about excessive harshness, accepted Fuller's resignation in August 1906. More systematic repression emerged between 1907 and 1908 following political unrest in Punjab and revolutionary bombings in Bengal. Key measures included bans on "seditious" meetings (May and November

1907), newspaper acts permitting press seizures (June 1908, February 1910), the Criminal Law Amendment Act (December 1908), which allowed bans on key samitis in Bengal, and the deportations of leaders such as Lajpat Rai, Ajit Singh (May 1907), and nine other Bengal leaders (December 1908). Despite Morley's expressions of unease, he lamented becoming "an accomplice in Cossack rule" - his interventions were largely limited to mitigating deportation terms. Repression continued under Hardinge's Home Member, Reginald Craddock, and culminated in the Defence of India Act (1915).

4.3.1 Conciliation and Reforms

Alongside repression, Morley sought to balance firm administrative control with concessions to Indian elites, particularly moderates like Gokhale. He advocated for greater Indian participation in legislative and executive councils, longer budget debates, and the introduction of amendments while firmly rejecting English-style political institutions. Minto and other officials resisted proposals for a parliamentary commission of inquiry, favouring local Indian authorities to oversee reform schemes. This led to the



Government of India Despatch on Reform, issued on 1 October 1908. Morley and Minto also diverged over which moderates to engage: Morley preferred Gokhale-style Congress leaders, whereas Minto sought loyalists outside Congress, including upper-class Muslims and princely states. In Udaipur (1909), Minto reinforced non-interference in the internal affairs of princely states, extending the post-Mutiny alliance with feudal chiefs in the face of nationalist agitation.

4.3.1.1 The Simla Deputation and the Rise of the All India Muslim League

Sumit Sarkar notes that the Simla Deputation of 10 October 1906 marked a significant success for the predominantly U.P. and Aligarh-based Muslim elite, who petitioned Viceroy Lord Minto for separate electorates and representation exceeding their numerical strength, arguing that Muslims' contributions to the defence of the British Empire warranted special recognition. This group quickly assumed leadership of the Muslim League, which had been founded earlier in December 1906 by Nawab Salimulla in Dacca. While nationalist and Hindu communalist critiques alleged British orchestration of this movement as a "stage-managed" initiative, Mohammed Ali famously described the Simla Deputation as a "command performance." However, evidence shows that the drive for Muslim representation had roots in earlier advocacy, dating back to Sayyid Ahmed Khan in the 1880s and later pursued by Mohsin-ul-Mulk.

Internal divisions among politically conscious Muslims were evident. Sumit Sarkar observes that Mohsin-ul-Mulk, for example, sought to counter the influence of younger radicals sympathetic to the Congress, such as Hasrat Mohani, Mohammed Ali, and Zafar Ali Khan, advocating a more assertive

political line while removing pledges of "aloofness from political agitation" from formal drafts. Simultaneously, British officials actively encouraged communal separatism, with Viceroy Minto and others favouring Muslims in administrative appointments and financial incentives, such as the Rs. 14 lakh loan to Nawab Salimulla of Dacca, thereby reinforcing elite Muslim influence. Leaders like the Aga Khan and Mohsin-ul-Mulk maintained close correspondence with the Viceroy's secretary and other officials, ensuring government approval for political initiatives, while shared interests between colonial authorities and elite communal groups facilitated the rapid growth of the Muslim League despite its limited membership and financial base.

By 1909, the League demonstrated political effectiveness, successfully countering proposals to replace separate electorates with a mixed electoral college through delegations led by Ameer Ali, which alarmed the Liberal government engaged in domestic reforms. However, its structural weakness became apparent with the sudden dissolution of the Eastern Bengal and Assam province in December 1911, which had initially supported Muslim elite interests. The Indian Councils Act of 1909, a key constitutional reform, proved short-lived, failing both to rally moderates and to maintain Hindu-Muslim separation politically.

The revocation of Bengal's partition in December 1911 at the Delhi Durbar, announced personally by King George V and endorsed by officials like Hardinge and Jenkins, dealt a blow to Muslim political expectations. While the act aimed to placate Muslims and secure Viceregal authority, it further alienated Muslim opinion, particularly due to Britain's refusal to support Turkey in international conflicts, Hardinge's rejection of a proposed Muslim University at Aligarh,

and the communal riots in Kanpur.

From 1912 onwards, the Muslim League came under the influence of the “Young Party,” comprising leaders such as Wazir Hassan, T.A.K. Sherwani, the Ali brothers, Hasrat Mohani, Zafar Ali Khan, and Fazlül Huq. This group represented a younger, professional, and often middle-class leadership, distinct from the landed “Old Party” veterans like Salimulla and Mohsin-ul-Mulk. The Young Party promoted greater militancy, pan-Islamism, and selective collaboration with nationalist Hindus. Its media organs, including Muhammad Ali’s *Comrade*, Abul Kalam Azad’s *Al-Hilal*, and Zafar Ali Khan’s *Zamindar*, became influential in disseminating anti-British and pan-Islamist ideas. The League’s initiatives also included the Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i Kaaba (1913) to fund the protection of Muslim holy sites and medical missions to Turkey during the Balkan Wars.

By March 1913, under Wazir Hassan’s leadership, the Muslim League formally adopted constitutional self-government as its goal, aligning its objectives with those of the Congress and laying the groundwork for future pan-Indian Hindu-Muslim cooperation, including the eventual Khilafat Movement.

4.3.2 The Indian Councils Act of 1909

In response to growing demands from both Moderates and the Muslim community, Viceroy Lord Minto and Secretary of State John Morley introduced a set of constitutional measures, collectively known as the Minto-Morley Reforms, which were formalised in the Indian Councils Act of 1909. These reforms recognised the elective principle for non-official council members, allowing limited Indian participation in legislative elections, although representation was

organised along class and communal lines. For the first time, separate electorates were created for Muslims at the central level, enabling only Muslims to vote for Muslim candidates—a move later widely regarded as detrimental to Indian unity.

The Indian Councils Act (Minto-Morley Reforms) introduced limited electoral principles and increased powers for discussion, questioning, and resolution sponsorship within legislative councils. Seat allocation and electoral qualifications were determined by local governments, allowing for bureaucratic manipulation. Special representation was provided for professional classes, landholders, Muslims, European commerce, and Indian commerce. An official majority persisted in the Imperial Legislative Council, with 27 elected members out of 60. Non-official majorities in provincial councils were largely illusory, incorporating nominated members. In Bengal, four seats for elected commercial interests further limited popular representation. The government retained the right to disallow politically dangerous candidates. Eight of the 27 Imperial Council seats were reserved for a Muslim separate electorate, which also captured three general seats in the 1910 elections.

4.3.2.1 Divide and Rule in Practice

The reforms effectively institutionalised a policy of divide and rule, privileging elite Muslim participation and ensuring official control while creating communal divisions and units. Sumit Sarkar highlights that the combination of cautious concessions, systematic repression, and communal engineering allowed the British to maintain authority, fragment nationalist unity, and continue administrative dominance over the Indian population through a mixture of co-optation and coercion.



The reforms, however, offered no meaningful solution to India's political aspirations. Lord Morley explicitly rejected the notion of introducing parliamentary or responsible government in India, asserting that these measures were not intended to pave the way for self-rule. The reforms primarily aimed to divide nationalist forces by creating friction between Moderates and Muslims, utilising separate electorates as a tool to fragment unity. Although officials and Muslim leaders spoke in communal terms, in reality, separate electorates primarily served a small section of the Muslim elite rather than the broader community. The indirect and multi-tiered electoral system further diluted the impact of Indian representation, allowing the perception of infiltration by the colonial administration.

Despite these limitations, some Moderate leaders, notably Gopal Krishna Gokhale, sought to use the councils constructively - advocating universal primary education, critiquing repressive policies, and drawing attention to the conditions of Indian labourers abroad. Yet, the broader effect of the reforms was largely superficial: while Indians had demanded self-government, the measures of 1909 amounted to little more than "benevolent despotism," offering symbolic participation without genuine authority. As Jawaharlal Nehru noted, the reforms erected political barriers, isolating Indian representatives and reversing centuries of social and political cohesion. In Morley's own words, "Reforms may not save the Raj, but if they don't, nothing else will," highlighting the colonial government's intent to placate opposition rather than empower Indians.

Recap

- ◆ British policies combined repression, concessions, and divide-and-rule to control Indian unrest.
- ◆ Fuller's harsh measures in Bengal met Morley-Minto's cautious administrative intervention.
- ◆ Repressive actions included bans, press seizures, deportations, and targeting revolutionary leaders.
- ◆ Morley promoted moderate engagement; Minto preferred loyalists outside Congress, balancing reforms.
- ◆ The Simla Deputation (1906) advanced elite Muslim interests, leading to the formation of the Muslim League.
- ◆ The Muslim League was strengthened through British support, financial incentives, and elite leadership coordination.
- ◆ The Minto-Morley Reforms (1909) introduced separate electorates, limiting Indian legislative participation.

- ◆ Separate electorates favoured elite Muslims, fragmenting nationalist unity and enabling colonial divide-and-rule.
- ◆ The reforms provided symbolic representation without genuine self-government, frustrating nationalist aspirations.
- ◆ Moderates attempted constructive use of councils, but the British retained ultimate authority and control.

Objective Questions

1. Who were primarily responsible for the development of British policies managing political unrest in India?
2. Which three pillars formed the British framework to manage political unrest in India?
3. Who implemented initial repressive measures in East Bengal and Assam after 1906?
4. Who founded the Muslim League in December 1906?
5. Which act formalised the Minto-Morley reforms?
6. Who represented the “Young Party” in the Muslim League after 1912?
7. Which British strategy was strengthened by combining concessions, repressive measures, and the promotion of communal divisions?
8. When did the Simla Deputation take place?

Answers

1. Secretary of State John Morley and Viceroy Lord Minto
2. Repression, concessions to moderates, and divide-and-rule strategies
3. Lt. Governor Bampfylde Fuller

4. Nawab Salimulla in Dacca
5. The Indian Councils Act of 1909
6. Wazir Hassan, T.A.K. Sherwani, the Ali brothers, Hasrat Mohani, Zafar Ali Khan, and Fazlül Huq
7. The policy of divide-and-rule
8. 10 October 1906

Assignments

1. How did repression, concessions to moderates, and divide-and-rule strategies collectively help the colonial administration manage political unrest?
2. Analyse the role of the Simla Deputation (1906) in the formation of the Muslim League.
3. Discuss the objectives and limitations of the Indian Councils Act of 1909 (Minto-Morley Reforms).
4. Evaluate the strategies of Viceroy Lord Minto and Secretary of State John Morley in balancing repression and conciliation.
5. Assess the impact of separate electorates and divide-and-rule policies on nationalist unity in India.

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UNIT

Indian National Movement During the First World War

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the impact of World War I on Indian nationalism
- ◆ analyse the emergence of radical and moderate nationalist movements
- ◆ assess the significance of the Lucknow Pact and factors leading to collaboration between Congress and the Muslim League
- ◆ evaluate the British responses and constitutional reforms in shaping nationalist strategies

Prerequisite

The early twentieth century in India was marked by growing political consciousness and mounting nationalist aspirations, shaped by both domestic developments and international events. British colonial rule had introduced limited reforms; however, political power remained firmly under imperial control, fostering dissatisfaction among Moderates, Extremists, and emerging Muslim elites. Simultaneously, Indian expatriates in North America and Southeast Asia encountered racial discrimination and economic restrictions, which radicalised sections of the diaspora and stimulated revolutionary activity abroad. The outbreak of the First World War further intensified these dynamics, presenting both an opportunity and a challenge: while the international conflict temporarily diverted British attention, it also heightened repression at home and abroad. Within India, the interplay of moderate constitutional agitation, such as the Home Rule Movement, and militant revolutionary efforts like the Ghadar Movement reflected the multiplicity of strategies adopted by nationalists seeking

self-government. Communal considerations, generational shifts, and transnational networks increasingly shaped the trajectory of Indian politics, setting the stage for broader mass movements and constitutional negotiations during and after the war.

Keywords

Ghadar, First World War, Radical Nationalist, Hindi Association, Home Rule Movement, Lucknow Pact, Minto- Morley

Discussion

The First World War broke out in June 1914 between two rival groups: Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Japan, and the USA (Allied Power) on one side, and Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey (Central Power) on the other. The war stemmed from the fierce imperialist rivalries among industrialised capitalist nations competing for colonies and markets. By the early 20th century, as available territories for conquest decreased, powers like Germany and Italy demanded a redivision of colonies, even through war. This led to an arms race and the formation of military alliances, dividing Europe into hostile blocs. National pride became tied to colonial expansion, with propaganda convincing people that imperial possessions symbolised national greatness. When war finally erupted in August 1914, it reshaped world politics and deeply affected India.

At the war's outbreak, Indian nationalist leaders, including Lokamanya Tilak, chose to support the British war effort, not out of loyalty, but in the hope that Britain would reward India's cooperation with political concessions and steps toward self-government. As Jawaharlal Nehru noted in his Autobiography, Indians had little sympathy for Britain and even felt satisfaction at its military setbacks, wishing only to see their rulers humbled. However,

this support was misguided, as the imperial powers were fighting primarily to preserve and protect their colonial empires, not to advance the cause of freedom for subject nations like India.

According to Bipan Chandra, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 strengthened Indian nationalism, which had remained largely dormant since the Swadeshi Movement. The world conflict presented India with a strategic "opportunity" to advance its nationalist aspirations. This opportunity was pursued in multiple ways: the Ghadar revolutionaries in North America attempted a violent overthrow of British rule, while Lokamanya Tilak, Annie Besant, and the Home Rule Leagues in India launched widespread agitation seeking Home Rule or Swaraj.

4.4.1 Emergence of the Ghadar Movement

From 1904 onwards, the West Coast of North America became home to an increasing number of Punjabi immigrants, largely peasants from densely populated districts such as Jullundur and Hoshiarpur. Many were ex-soldiers or labourers seeking economic opportunity, while others had emigrated to the Far East or Fiji before arriving in Canada

radical groups formed links with the Khalsa Diwan Society and attempted to engage British authorities through deputations to London and India, successfully meeting the Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab. Their visit also sparked a series of public meetings in Punjab, receiving strong support from both the press and the general public.

The sustained efforts in North America created a sense of solidarity and nationalist consciousness among Indian immigrants. Their repeated inability to secure intervention from the British or Indian governments regarding immigration restrictions and discriminatory laws, such as the Alien Land Law, which barred Indians from owning land in the US, fuelled growing impatience and discontent. This climate of frustration ultimately laid the groundwork for a revolutionary movement, marking the Ghadar movement as a significant precursor to militant anti-colonial activism.

4.4.1.3 Early Indian Activism Abroad

Bipan Chandra noted that the first direct stimulus to organised revolutionary activity among the Indian diaspora was supplied by the Sikh cleric Bhagwan Singh, who visited Vancouver in early 1913 after working in Hong Kong and the Malay States. Singh openly advocated the violent overthrow of British rule and promoted *Vande Mataram* as a revolutionary salute. His inflammatory propaganda led to his expulsion from Canada after only three months, but his visit marked an important moment in the radicalisation of expatriate Indians.

The locus of anti-colonial agitation then moved decisively to the United States, whose comparatively liberal political climate allowed Indian exiles to organise with fewer immediate constraints. The movement found a central organiser in Lala

Har Dayal, an Indian political exile who arrived in California in April 1911, briefly taught at Stanford, and rapidly immersed himself in revolutionary politics after the December 1912 bombing of Viceroy Lord Hardinge in Delhi. That event revived Har Dayal's belief in the feasibility of an armed uprising against British rule and prompted him to voice support for the attack in a *Yugantar* circular.

4.4.1.4 Formation of the Hindi Association

In May 1913, the Hindi Association was founded in Portland; at its inaugural meeting, attended by activists such as Bhai Parmanand, Sohan Singh Bhakna, and Harnam Singh 'Tundilat', Har Dayal outlined a bold programme: exploit American freedom to wage propaganda against Britain, mobilise Indian soldiers, and prepare cadres to return to India and foment revolt. A Working Committee was formed, plans were laid for a weekly paper, *The Ghadar*, and a San Francisco base called Yugantar Ashram was established. Subsequent representative meetings in other towns confirmed these decisions and launched what became known as the Ghadar movement.

Ghadar militants rapidly embarked on an intensive propaganda campaign among Punjabi immigrant labourers. The Yugantar Ashram functioned as both headquarters and refuge, while activists toured mills and farms to disseminate revolutionary literature and recruit supporters. The movement deliberately targeted the Indian workforce and used accessible, militant messaging to transform the political outlook of immigrant communities.

4.4.1.5 The Ghadar Newspaper

The first Urdu issue of *Ghadar* appeared on 1st November 1913, followed by a Gurmukhi edition on 9th December. The

paper's title, literally "Revolt", and its masthead slogan *Angrezi Raj ka Dushman* ('Enemy of British Rule') left the paper's intent unmistakable. A regular feature, *Angrezi Raj Ka Kacha Chittha* ('An Exposé of British Rule'), distilled a comprehensive criticism of colonial governance, economic drain, famines, repressive military spending, communal fomenting, and judicial discrimination, and concluded by urging a renewed armed insurrection, citing the small number of British soldiers relative to India's vast population and calling for a "second" uprising after 1857.

Ghadar combined analytical critique with cultural weaponry. It serialised V.D. Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence: 1857* and celebrated previous revolutionaries - Tilak, Aurobindo, Savarkar, Madame Cama, Ajit Singh, Sufi Amba Prasad - and groups such as Anushilan, Yugantar, and Russian secret societies. Poems collected as *Ghadar di Goonj* circulated freely and powerfully, blending secular appeals to communal unity with calls to arms, exhortations that transcended caste and creed, and directly challenged Punjabi immigrant loyalty to the Raj.

Ghadar's reach was remarkably swift: within months, its issues and poems reached Indian communities across the Philippines, East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, and India itself. The paper's rhetoric reframed the Punjabi immigrant's self-image from loyal colonial soldier to insurgent patriot, invoking historic Sikh valour and shaming perceived subservience. The magazine's emotional intensity produced an unexpected eagerness for immediate action among readers, exceeding even Har Dayal's own expectations about the time required to prepare for a revolution.

Bipan Chandra emphasises how *Ghadar*'s agitational mix of critique, history, and verse generated a thirst for direct action.



The year 1914 marked a turning point for the Ghadar Movement due to three pivotal events: the arrest and escape of Lala Har Dayal, the Komagata Maru incident, and the outbreak of the First World War. Har Dayal was arrested on 25 March 1914, officially for anarchist activities, though it was widely suspected that the British government orchestrated it. Released on bail, he fled abroad, abruptly ending his active involvement with the movement.

The outbreak of World War I created a perceived opportunity for the Ghadar Movement. Though unprepared, the leaders resolved to act, planning to inspire Indian soldiers to join an armed revolt. The Ghadar Party issued the *Ailan-e-Jung* (Proclamation of War), and prominent leaders travelled across Asia to recruit volunteers. Some impatient activists, such as Kartar Singh Sarabha and Raghubar Dayal Gupta, returned to India immediately. Anticipating these actions, the British passed the Ingress into India Ordinance, scrutinising returning emigrants. Of roughly 8,000 returnees, 5,000 were allowed to proceed, while 1,500 faced restrictions or internment. Despite these efforts, the Ghadarites struggled to mobilise the civilian population in Punjab, meeting indifference or hostility, and turned their focus to the army. Attempts to incite mutiny in November 1914 failed due to poor organisation.

The Ghadar Movement should not be dismissed as a failure. While the revolt did not achieve independence, it played a vital role in deepening nationalist consciousness, testing revolutionary strategies, and fostering a tradition of resistance, secularism, and egalitarianism. Ideologically, the Ghadarites

were highly successful. Through publications like *The Ghadar* and *Ghadar di Goonj*, they spread nationalist critiques of colonialism to Indian immigrants, emphasising secularism, patriotism over religion, and unity across regions. Leaders hailed from diverse religions and regions, yet the movement remained cohesive, promoting slogans like *Vande Mataram* as rallying cries and redefining religion as adherence to moral principles rather than ritual.

The movement also embraced democratic and egalitarian ideals. Influenced by anarchist, syndicalist, and socialist ideas, Har Dayal promoted equality and internationalist perspectives, referencing Irish, Mexican, and Russian revolutionaries. Yet, Bipan Chandra points out key weaknesses: the Ghadar leaders underestimated the scale of planning necessary for a successful revolt, overestimated the readiness of Indian masses, lacked centralised leadership, and had minimal organisational structure. The romantic fervour of 1914–15 ultimately cost the lives and freedom of many leaders, but surviving Ghadarites later contributed to secular national and peasant movements in Punjab during the 1920s and 1930s, leaving a lasting ideological legacy.

4.4.2 Home Rule Movement

The Home Rule Movement in India emerged as a significant and more organised nationalist response to British rule during World War I, contrasting with the more dramatic but less sustained Ghadar revolutionary efforts abroad. After serving six years in Mandalay, Bal Gangadhar Tilak returned to India in June 1914 to find the political landscape markedly changed: Aurobindo Ghose had renounced active politics, Lala Lajpat Rai was abroad, and the Indian National Congress was still recovering from the 1907 Surat split, the repression of Swadeshi activists, and the Moderate disillusionment with the 1909 reforms. Tilak

initially focused on securing the readmission of Extremists into Congress, emphasising reconciliation with Moderates and loyalty to the Crown, while condemning violent acts as counterproductive.

Many Moderate Congress leaders, dissatisfied with past decisions and the party's inactivity, responded favourably to Tilak, aided by Annie Besant, who had recently joined the Congress and was determined to energise nationalist politics. At sixty-six, Besant had long been involved in Theosophy and reformist movements in India and sought to replicate the Irish Home Rule model. She encouraged the Congress to admit Tilak and the Extremists while simultaneously preparing her own campaign for Home Rule, using her newspapers *New India* and *Commonweal* to mobilise public opinion and organise meetings and conferences demanding self-government.

Tilak's efforts proceeded cautiously, ensuring that his activities did not alienate Moderates. Early local associations focused on promoting Congress unity rather than direct agitation, and Tilak sought to demonstrate reasonableness and restraint. By the December 1915 Congress session, the Extremists were readmitted, aided by the weakening opposition following Pherozeshah Mehta's death. While Besant failed to secure Congress backing for Home Rule Leagues, she pushed forward independently, creating her own League in September 1916. Tilak and Besant divided India into separate spheres of influence for their respective Leagues, avoiding conflicts, and both focused on educating the masses about self-rule through public meetings, pamphlets, and political lectures.

Tilak's Home Rule League emphasised secular, inclusive nationalism. He advocated for linguistic state formation, vernacular education, and aligned with non-Brahmins in social reform while condemning caste



discrimination and untouchability. His pamphlets and lectures reached a wide audience, and the League grew rapidly, despite government repression. On his 60th birthday in July 1916, the government attempted to intimidate him with legal threats, but his subsequent victory in the High Court bolstered the movement, adding momentum and credibility to the Home Rule campaign. By April 1917, Tilak's League had 14,000 members. Besant's League, though looser in structure, also expanded across India, boasting 200 branches and 7,000 members by March 1917, mobilising political discussion, education, and protest, especially during instances of government repression.

Government opposition intensified as the movement grew. In June 1917, the Madras authorities arrested Besant and her associates, triggering nationwide protests, resignations, and support from previously inactive Moderates. Tilak advocated passive resistance, and widespread petitions and protests further strengthened the movement. The British government, under Montagu, adopted a conciliatory stance in August 1917, promising gradual Indian participation in governance, legitimising Home Rule demands and ending Besant's internment. She was subsequently elected Congress president in December 1917, highlighting her prominence.

However, by 1918, the momentum of the Home Rule Movement began to wane. Moderates, pacified by promised reforms and Besant's release, withdrew from active agitation. Disagreements over reform proposals, Besant's indecision on passive resistance, and Tilak's absence in England temporarily left the movement leaderless. Despite this decline, the movement had successfully created a politically conscious generation of nationalists, strengthened organisational links between urban and

rural areas, and popularised the idea of self-government. These developments set the stage for Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's leadership and the mass Satyagraha campaigns following the 1919 Rowlatt Act, drawing upon the network and nationalist awareness cultivated by the Home Rule Movement.

4.4.3 Lucknow Pact

The Lucknow Congress of December 1916 marked a major milestone for the movement. Tilak's League flooded the Congress with delegates, and both he and Besant played central roles in the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League, promoting Hindu-Muslim unity despite opposition. Though the Pact included separate electorates for Muslims, a contentious point, it reflected a commitment to unity against colonial rule. Tilak also proposed a Working Committee for continuous Congress operations, an idea later realised in Gandhi's restructured Congress in 1920. Following the session, both Home Rule Leagues toured widely, spreading nationalist awareness.

The Lucknow session of 1916 marked a significant moment in India's nationalist movement, as the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League came together to present joint constitutional demands to the British government. This rapprochement occurred during a period when the Muslim League, increasingly influenced by younger, militant nationalists, had begun aligning with Congress objectives and adopting a more anti-imperialist stance. As A.C. Majumdar, president of the Lucknow session, observed, "After nearly ten years of painful separation... both wings of the Indian Nationalist Party have come to realise that united they stand, but divided they fall."

4.4.3.1 Factors Behind the Muslim League's Shift

Several factors contributed to this change in the League's attitude:

1. Foreign Policy Grievances:

Britain's refusal to support Turkey, ruled by the Khalifa, in the Balkan Wars (1912–13) and in its conflict with Italy (1911) caused widespread anger among Indian Muslims.

2. Domestic Dissatisfaction: The annulment of the 1905 Bengal partition disappointed sections of Muslims who had supported it, while the denial of an empowered university at Aligarh alienated others.

3. Rise of Nationalist Youth:

Younger League members, seeking a more assertive political role beyond the Aligarh school's limited outlook, increasingly advocated collaboration for Indian self-government. The 1912 Calcutta session of the League had already committed to working with other groups for a self-governing system compatible with Muslim interests.

4. War-time Repression: During World War I, government suppression of nationalist publications such as Maulana Azad's *Al-Hilal* and Mohammad Ali's *Comrade*, alongside the internment of leaders including the Ali brothers, Maulana Azad, and Hasrat Mohani, fuelled anti-

imperialist sentiment among the League's younger members.

4.4.3.2 Provisions of the Lucknow Pact

The Lucknow Pact established a cooperative framework between the Congress and the League:

- ◆ The League agreed to present joint constitutional demands with Congress.
- ◆ Congress recognised the principle of separate electorates for Muslims, which would continue until any community demanded joint electorates.
- ◆ Muslims were granted a fixed proportion of legislative seats at both central and provincial levels.

The joint demands included:

- ◆ A commitment by the government to grant Indians self-government at the earliest opportunity.
- ◆ Expansion of representative assemblies at both central and provincial levels, with elected majorities and enhanced powers.
- ◆ Five-year terms for legislative councils.
- ◆ Salaries of the Secretary of State for India to be paid from the British treasury.
- ◆ Half of the viceroy's and provincial governors' executive councils consist of Indians.

While the Pact expanded the reforms introduced by the Minto-Morley scheme, it

retained structural limitations: the executive was not fully responsible to the legislature, leaving the potential for constitutional deadlock over crucial matters like the budget. Congress's acceptance of separate electorates allowed the two organisations to cooperate politically while maintaining distinct identities, a step that indirectly contributed to the later evolution of the two-nation theory.

The Pact did not focus on integrating the broader masses of both communities, but it generated significant public enthusiasm and demonstrated a commitment by Congress to protect minority interests. The government, in turn, attempted to placate nationalist demands through the Montagu Declaration of August 1917, signalling eventual self-government for Indians.

4.4.4 Montagu's Statement of August 1917

On 20 August 1917, Edwin Samuel Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, delivered a statement in the British House of Commons, later known as the August Declaration of 1917. Montagu asserted that the British government aimed for the "increasing participation of Indians in every branch of administration" and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, ultimately moving toward the progressive establishment of responsible government in India within the British Empire. This marked a significant departure from the

1909 Minto-Morley reforms, as the pursuit of self-government by Indian nationalists could no longer be labelled seditious.

The declaration implied that Indian rulers would be accountable to elected representatives, not solely to the British authorities in London. However, the British made it clear that power would not be fully transferred to legislatures dominated by Indian majorities. To balance this, the concept of dyarchy was proposed, wherein certain powers would be delegated to elected assemblies while key authority remained with the executive, gradually increasing Indian participation.

4.4.4.1 Indian Objections

Indian leaders raised two main objections to Montagu's statement:

1. The absence of a definite timeline for the introduction of responsible government.
2. Exclusive British control over the nature and timing of reforms, which Indians resented as paternalistic, feeling that the British would unilaterally decide what was best for India.

This ambivalence reflected the cautious approach of the British towards political reforms, offering symbolic concessions without an immediate transfer of real power.

Recap

- ◆ World War I erupted due to imperial rivalry, alliances, and colonial competition.
- ◆ Indian nationalists supported Britain, expecting political concessions not out of loyalty.

- ◆ The Ghadar Movement mobilised expatriates, promoting armed revolt and nationalist propaganda.
- ◆ Punjabi immigrants faced discrimination abroad, fuelling revolutionary consciousness and anti-British activism.
- ◆ Lala Har Dayal organised the Hindi Association, the Ghadar newspaper, and Yugantar Ashram.
- ◆ The Komagata Maru incident intensified Indian diaspora protests and revolutionary recruitment efforts.
- ◆ The Home Rule Movement, led by Tilak and Besant, spread nationalist awareness within India.
- ◆ The Lucknow Pact (1916) united the Congress and Muslim League for constitutional cooperation.
- ◆ Montagu's August 1917 statement promised gradual self-government, introducing dyarchy in administration.
- ◆ Reforms remained limited; Indian leaders sought concrete timelines and real political authority.

Objective Questions

1. When did the First World War break out?
2. Where did the Ghadar Movement primarily emerge among the Indian diaspora?
3. Who was the central organiser of the Ghadar Movement in the United States?
4. What was the name of the newspaper published by the Ghadar Movement?
5. Which 1914 incident involved the ship carrying 376 Indians being blocked in Canada?
6. Who founded the Home Rule League in India alongside Tilak?
7. Which 1916 agreement marked Hindu-Muslim cooperation within the nationalist movement?
8. Who was the founder of the newspaper *Free Hindustan*?
9. Which revolutionary attempted coordination of a mutiny in India in 1915?
10. What slogan was used by the Ghadar newspaper?

Answers

1. June 1914
2. On the West Coast of North America (USA and Canada)
3. Lala Har Dayal
4. Ghadar
5. The Komagata Maru incident
6. Annie Besant
7. The Lucknow Pact
8. Tarak Nath Das
9. Rash Behari Bose
10. *Angrezi Raj ka Dushman* ("Enemy of British Rule")

Assignments

1. Analyse the impact of the First World War on Indian nationalism.
2. Examine the emergence and activities of the Ghadar Movement among Indian immigrants abroad.
3. Discuss the objectives, strategies, and achievements of the Home Rule Movement in India.
4. Evaluate the significance of the Lucknow Pact of 1916 in fostering Hindu-Muslim political unity.
5. Critically assess the Montagu Declaration of August 1917.

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UNIT

Nationalism and Culture : Literature and Arts

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the role of regional literature and the arts in fostering patriotism and nationalism in 19th- and early 20th-century India
- ◆ analyse the interplay of culture, social reform, and political ideology in shaping nationalist thought
- ◆ evaluate the ideological and communal dimensions of Indian literature during the freedom struggle

Prerequisite

An informed engagement with nationalism and culture in 19th and early 20th-century India requires an understanding of how literature and the arts functioned as crucial sites for the articulation of cultural nationalism under colonial rule. It is important to be familiar with the broader landscape of imperial domination, social reform movements, and the gradual emergence of nationalist consciousness, within which writers, artists, and intellectuals across regions turned to cultural production to assert civilisational self-worth and collective identity. Awareness of the growth of regional literary traditions such as Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, and Hindi-Urdu is essential, as these languages became vehicles for reimagining the past, addressing social inequalities, and embedding political critique within aesthetic and symbolic forms. Literary genres including poetry, fiction, drama, and historical writing often encoded nationalist sentiment in indirect and allegorical modes, particularly in response to colonial censorship. At the same time, it is important to recognise that cultural nationalism was neither homogeneous nor uncontested, as debates over language, religion, history, and reform revealed both integrative impulses and emerging communal and ideological tensions that shaped the intellectual foundations of the freedom struggle.

Keywords

Patriotic Literature, Theatre and Drama, Regional Literature, Vicarious Nationalism, Cultural Revivalism

Discussion

4.5.1 Nationalism and Cultural Awakening through Regional Literature and Arts in 19th-Century India

The earliest expressions of patriotism among the Indian intelligentsia naturally found voice through regional literature. Modern Indian literature, especially prose, which had been largely undeveloped before the 19th century, grew in close connection with social reform movements. By the mid-19th century, this literary activity began to absorb a strong patriotic spirit. During the 1860s and 1870s, Bengal witnessed a surge of patriotic poems and songs lamenting India's suffering and the decline of its traditional industries. Many of these works were composed for the Hindu Mela, initiated in 1867 by Nabagopal Mitra with support from the Tagore family, to promote national pride and unity.

The theatre also became a powerful medium of political expression. Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan* (1860) boldly exposed the oppression of indigo planters, while later plays of the 1870s contained strong anti-British undertones, prompting the colonial government to enact Lytton's Dramatic Performances Act in 1876 to curb nationalist drama. The most influential literary figure of the period was Bankimchandra Chatterjee, whose historical novels, culminating in *Anandamath* (1882) with its famous hymn *Vande Mataram*, stirred deep patriotic emotion. Through his essays and fiction, Bankimchandra sought to rekindle

interest in India's past and instil national pride, giving literary form to the growing sense of nationalism.

However, in the following decades of the 1880s and 1890s, while Hindu revivalism gained prominence, direct political engagement in literature declined. The theatre shifted its focus to Girishchandra Ghosh's sentimental family dramas and mythological plays, which largely avoided political themes. As Sumit Sankar observes, Bipin Chandra Pal remarked in 1903, since the days of the Ilbert Bill controversy, politics had been neglected in favour of abstract religious ideas, resulting in religious songs replacing earlier national songs.

Across India, the rise of nationalism was closely linked with the growth of regional literatures, though the pace and pattern varied in different regions depending on local patriotic developments. In Maharashtra, this connection was particularly evident in the rapid growth of Marathi publications, as observed by M.G. Ranade in his *Note on the Growth of Marathi Literature* (1898). As Sumit Sarkar noted, the number of Marathi works expanded remarkably, from just three between 1818 and 1827 to over 3,800 by the 1880s. From the 1840s onwards, new editions of medieval *bhakti* poetry and historical chronicles (*bakhars*) began to circulate, marking a resurgence of cultural consciousness. Ranade's own historical studies encouraged this revival and helped shape the later idealisation of Shivaji, a theme that Tilak actively promoted after 1895. Yet, their interpretations diverged: Ranade regarded the



17th-century movement as a *bhakti*-inspired reformist awakening that transcended caste barriers and blamed Peshwa conservatism for Maratha decline, whereas Tilak, Kelkar, and Rajwade celebrated Shivaji as a militant defender of Hinduism under the guidance of his spiritual mentor, Ramdas.

In contrast, Jotiba Phule's ballad in 1869 portrayed Shivaji as a Shudra ruler, directly challenging upper-caste depictions of history. Political and social writing also evolved along diverse ideological lines: Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Lokahitavadi), through his *Satapatra Series* (1848–50), advocated social reform and indigenous enterprise while broadly approving of British governance; on the other hand, Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar's *Nibandhamala* (1874–81) voiced strong revivalist and anti-British opinions. Collectively, these varied interpretations and literary expressions reveal how Marathi literature became a vibrant forum for negotiating political, social, and cultural ideas intertwined with the broader nationalist awakening.

R.C. Dutt (1848–1909) exemplifies the blend of Western education and Indian cultural pride that shaped early nationalism. Though deeply westernised through his service in the British-dominated Indian Civil Service, he remained a committed Hindu who respected India's traditions. His *Economic History of India* exposed colonial exploitation and made him a pioneer of economic nationalism, while his translations of the *Rig Veda*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*, along with his *History of Civilization in Ancient India*, reflected his "literary patriotism." Dutt's historical novels, inspired by national pride, were as influential in his time as his economic writings, demonstrating that Indian nationalism was not merely political or economic but also deeply cultural and emotional.

Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi

(1855–1907), a key figure in modern Gujarati literature, wrote his epic novel *Sarasvatichandra* (1887–1901) to educate and inspire readers about India's destiny. The novel reflects on India's subjugation, lamenting the loss of independence, yet paradoxically expresses trust in British rule, believing that their sense of justice and democracy could prepare India for self-governance. Tripathi also emphasised that Indians needed to safeguard their own interests to ensure their welfare under colonial rule. This dual attitude toward British authority, acknowledging both exploitation and benefits, was common among early Indian intellectuals. Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar (1850–1882) highlighted this tension, noting in *Nibandhamala* that English education ("English poetry") had subtly undermined India's freedom while simultaneously fostering faith in British rule as divinely ordained.

As Sumit Sarkar observes, the growth of patriotic literature in regional languages like Bengali and Marathi was complex and often carried conflicting strands of identity - national, regional, and communal. In Bengal, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's writings reflected this ambiguity: while aiming to inspire national pride, his focus remained largely on Bengal's history and identity. He portrayed Bengal's subjugation as beginning with Bakhtiyar Khilji rather than with British conquest, criticised Mughal centralisation for weakening regional life, and used harsh depictions of Muslims in his later historical novels such as *Anandamath*, *Debi Chaudhurani*, and *Sitaram*. Romantic glorifications of Hindu valour, drawn from James Tod's legends of Rajput heroism against Muslim invaders, spread widely through Bengali poetry, novels, and even children's books. The cult of Shivaji was also introduced into Bengali nationalism, despite Bengal's mostly negative historical encounters with the Marathas during the destructive *bargi* raids of the 1740s.

This form of emotional identification with distant Hindu heroes, termed “vicarious nationalism” by Bipan Chandra, emerged partly because direct criticism of British rule was risky, especially for individuals like Bankim, who served in the colonial administration. However, using Muslims as symbolic adversaries in place of the British had damaging communal effects. Bankim became a cultural icon for Hindu youth during the Swadeshi movement after 1905, but his portrayal of Muslims provoked resentment even among nationalist Muslim circles; journals like *The Mussalman*, though sympathetic to the freedom cause, condemned his anti-Muslim imagery. In reaction, Muslim intellectuals developed their own form of vicarious nationalism, celebrating Islamic power and historical figures, such as Aurangzeb, who had been denigrated in Hindu narratives. Urdu poets like Altaf Husain Hali and Shibli Nomani expressed nostalgia for Islam’s lost global glory, while in Bengal, the Muslim poet Kaikobad echoed similar sentiments. Thus, what began as a movement to awaken patriotism also unintentionally deepened communal divisions, shaping divergent strands of Hindu and Muslim nationalism in late 19th-century India.

In Tamil Nadu and the Hindi-speaking regions, linguistic and cultural developments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries took on complex social and political dimensions. The rediscovery of Tamil history and classical literature, supported by British scholars like Robert Caldwell and J.H. Nelson gradually acquired a strong anti-Brahminical tone that sometimes extended into anti-north Indian or anti-Aryan sentiments, a trend occasionally encouraged by colonial officials such as Governor Grant-Duff in 1886. In north India, the rise of literary Hindi was equally layered. Modern Hindi, largely an artificial creation linked to Hindu revivalist movements, found early leadership under

‘Bharatendu’ Harishchandra (1850–1885). His writings combined cultural nationalism, promoting swadeshi goods, advocating for Hindi in courts instead of Urdu, and demanding a ban on cow slaughter, with political loyalty to the British.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Urdu dominated north Indian literary and cultural life, shared by Hindus and Muslims alike. Even in the 1880s, Urdu far outstripped Hindi in book publishing and newspaper circulation, and prominent writers like Premchand initially wrote in Urdu before switching to Hindi. The Arya Samaj and orthodox Hindu groups’ campaign for Hindi in the Devanagari script had populist roots, challenging the Persianised nature of Urdu. Yet, the Sanskritised Hindi they promoted was linguistically distant from the region’s spoken dialects like Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, and Awadhi. The more troubling outcome was that linguistic and script differences began to align with religious identities, deepening communal divisions. Thus, in both north and south India, the intertwining of language, religion, and politics created enduring problems that continued to shape the nation long after independence.

4.5.2 Literature and Art in the 20th Century

After the First World War, the focus of India’s freedom struggle shifted from merely attaining independence to defining its meaning and purpose. Writers and thinkers questioned who freedom would truly benefit, emphasising that replacing British rulers with Indian elites would not solve social and economic inequalities. Premchand’s character Rupmati in *Ahuti* voices this concern, insisting that Swaraj must bring real social justice, not just new masters or unchanged power structures.

During the last thirty years of the struggle, Indian literature increasingly explored



the ideological dimension of freedom. It examined the nature of the movement, the character of its leaders, and the principles guiding it, recognising that the kind of independent India achieved would reflect the ideals and actions of those leading the struggle. In *Ghaban* (1931), Premchand highlights this moral caution: even before attaining power, leaders' indulgence in luxuries or selfishness could endanger the welfare of the people once independence was secured.

Premchand (1880–1936), the prominent Hindi-Urdu novelist and nationalist, critically examined the darker side of the nationalist movement. In *Rangbhumi* (1925) and *Karmabhumi* (1932), he exposed the self-interest of educated nationalist leaders, who disguised personal ambition as patriotism, though they eventually recognised their failings. In contrast, *Godan* (1936), his masterpiece, presents a bleaker view: leaders like Rai Saheb, Khanna, and Pandit Omkarnath exploit nationalism for personal gain, showing that oppression arises from entrenched socio-economic structures rather than individual wickedness. Premchand emphasises the network of exploitation connecting zamindars, businessmen, and industrialists, maintained by the political order, which keeps peasants and workers oppressed.

Premchand's works highlight the duality of class and nation, showing that national freedom must not become a cover for the dominant classes to exploit the poor. Socialist ideas, inspired by the Russian Revolution, offered one vision of class struggle, while Gandhian trusteeship suggested moral reform and compromise. Premchand himself was torn between these approaches, as reflected in his novels and personal writings, revealing the complex ideological dilemmas faced by Indian intellectuals during the freedom struggle.

To understand the multiple forces shaping India's freedom struggle, the pre-1947 novels of Bengali writer Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay (1898–1971) provide valuable insight. His semi-autobiographical *Dhatrivedata* prepares the ground for *Ganadevata* and *Panchagram*, which together depict the disintegration of village society under exploitation and industrialisation. Tarasankar focuses not on individuals but on community life, showing how the Congress, the Muslim League, and revolutionary movements influenced ordinary villagers. Through the lives of people in five villages, he presents the freedom struggle from the perspective of the deprived and dispossessed, portraying how idealism, power, and material interests intersect in shaping their fate.

Despite his deep sympathy for the poor, Tarasankar also conveys a nostalgic attachment to traditional village culture. His novels thus reveal a tension between implicit ideological radicalism—support for the oppressed—and social conservatism, reflecting the complex realities of his time. Other contemporary writers also addressed political and social issues: Rabindranath Tagore, in *Char Adhyay* (1934), condemned revolutionary violence, while Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai, in *Divyachakshu* (1932), illustrated the conversion of a revolutionary to Gandhian nonviolence. Yet these works were not fully representative of broader literary trends.

A more typical example emerges in K.M. Munshi, a Congress leader and novelist, whose work, while reflecting a secular political stance, glorifies a Hindu past and frames Indian nationalism in a Hindu cultural context. These writers highlight how contemporary literature both reflected and shaped the ideological currents and social complexities of India's freedom movement.

Recap

- ◆ Regional literature expressed early patriotism, linking modern prose to social reform movements.
- ◆ Bengal's patriotic poems and songs (1860s–70s) lamented India's suffering and declining industries.
- ◆ The theatre exposed oppression; Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* inspired nationalism with the *Bande Mataram* hymn.
- ◆ Late 19th-century Bengali literature retreated politically, focusing on religion, with devotional hymns predominating.
- ◆ Marathi literature revived Shivaji's image, blending social reform, *bhakti*, and nationalist historical interpretation.
- ◆ R.C. Dutt combined Western education and Indian cultural pride, pioneering economic nationalism.
- ◆ Gujarati literature, like *Sarasvatichandra*, balanced critique of British rule with cautious optimism.
- ◆ Language, religion, and literature intertwined, deepening communal divisions in north and south India.
- ◆ Premchand critiqued leaders' selfish nationalism, emphasising social justice and class exploitation through his works.
- ◆ Tarasankar and contemporary writers depicted the freedom struggle, village life, and ideological-social tensions realistically.

Objective Questions

1. Which nineteenth-century Bengali reformers linked literature with social reform movements?
2. Which play exposed the oppression of indigo planters and prompted the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876?
3. Who authored *Anandamath*, famous for the hymn *Bande Mataram*?
4. Which Marathi thinker promoted social reform and indigenous enterprise while approving British governance?

5. Which epic Gujarati novel reflected India's subjugation yet expressed trust in British rule?
6. Which Urdu poets expressed nostalgia for Islam's lost glory as a reaction to Hindu nationalist literature?
7. Who is considered a pioneer of economic nationalism in India through works like *Economic History of India*?
8. Which writer condemned revolutionary violence in *Char Adhyay* (1934)?
9. Who portrayed Shivaji as a Shudra ruler in 1869?
10. What does Bipan Chandra mean by the term 'vicarious nationalism'?

Answers

1. Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar
2. *Nil Darpan* by Dinabandhu Mitra
3. Bankimchandra Chatterjee
4. Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Lokahitavadi)
5. *Sarasvatichandra* by Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi
6. Altaf Husain Hali, Shibli Nomani, and Kaikobad
7. R.C. Dutt
8. Rabindranath Tagore
9. Jotiba Phule
10. Emotional identification with distant heroes

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of regional literature in expressing patriotism and fostering nationalism in 19th-century India.
2. Examine the impact of theatre and historical novels on Indian nationalist sentiment.
3. Analyse the diversity of nationalist expression in Marathi literature.
4. Evaluate the influence of language and literary culture on communal and regional identities.
5. Assess the ideological and social dimensions of Indian literature in the 20th century.

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BLOCK

Towards Mass Nationalism



UNIT

Gandhi's Techniques of Mass Mobilisation

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand Gandhiji's critique of modern civilization
- ◆ explain core principles of truth and non-violence
- ◆ analyse Gandhi's theory and practice of Satyagraha
- ◆ evaluate civil disobedience and constructive programme strategies
- ◆ internalise the values of Gandhian techniques and ideologies in analysing the contemporary political scenario in India

Prerequisite

This unit introduces learners to the philosophical and ideological foundations of Mahatma Gandhi's thought, particularly through a critical reading of his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Gandhi's critique of modern Western civilisation and his alternative vision of *Swaraj* - or self-rule are central themes that provide the basis for understanding his unique political and ethical framework. Learners are expected to have a basic understanding of India's colonial context and the broader nationalist movement to fully appreciate the relevance and radical nature of Gandhi's ideas.

A key aspect of the unit is the exploration of Gandhian core principles, especially *Satya* (Truth) and *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), which form the moral and spiritual backbone of his political ideology. Unlike conventional political strategies based on power and domination, Gandhi emphasised the role of personal ethics and moral authority in shaping public life. These ideas challenge students to think beyond political expediency and reflect on the ethical dimensions of political action.

The unit also focuses on Gandhi's methods of mass mobilisation, particularly Satyagraha, as both a theory and a method of political engagement. Students will study how civil disobedience, non-cooperation, the boycott of foreign goods, and constructive programmes (such as khadi, village industries, and communal harmony) were used not merely as protest tools but as transformative social practices aimed at self-reliance and national regeneration.

Keywords

Hind Swaraj, Swaraj, Modern Civilisation, Truth (Satya), Non-violence (Ahimsa), Moral Authority, Personal Ethics, Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience

Discussion

5.1.1. Satyagraha and Ahimsa: Philosophical Roots

M.K. Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar, Gujarat. After completing his legal education in Britain, he went to South Africa to practise law. Imbued with a high sense of justice, he was revolted by the injustice, discrimination, and degradation to which Indians had to submit in the South African colonies. Indian labourers who had gone to South Africa, along with the merchants who followed, were denied the right to vote. They had to register and pay a poll tax and could not reside except in prescribed locations that were insanitary and congested. In some of the South African colonies, Asians, as well as Africans, could not stay outdoors after 9 p.m., nor could they use public footpaths. Gandhi soon became the leader of the struggle against these conditions and, during 1893-94, was engaged in a heroic though unequal struggle against the racist authorities of South Africa. It was during this long struggle, lasting nearly two decades, that he evolved the technique of satyagraha, based on truth and non-violence. The ideal

satyagrahi was to be truthful and perfectly peaceful, but at the same time, he would refuse to submit to what he considered wrong. He would accept suffering willingly in the course of the struggle against the wrongdoer. This struggle was to be part of his love of truth. However, even while resisting evil, he would love the evil-doer. Hatred would be alien to the nature of a true satyagrahi. He would, moreover, be utterly fearless, never bowing down before evil, regardless of the consequences. In Gandhi's eyes, non-violence was not a weapon of the weak and cowardly; only the strong and brave could practise it. Even violence was preferable to cowardice. In a famous article in his weekly journal, *Young India*, he wrote in 1920 that "*Non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute,*" but that "*where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence... I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.*" He once summed up his entire philosophy of life as follows: "*The only virtue I want*

5.1.1.1 Satyagraha: Concept and Practice

Gandhi developed the idea of Satyagraha as a philosophy and method of struggle during his time in South Africa, also referring to it as “love-force.” He realised early on that the quest for truth could not be pursued through violence. Instead, the aim was to transform the opponent through patience and compassion. Gandhi emphasised that truth is often perceived subjectively - what may seem true to one person could appear as error to another. In his view, true patience involved self-suffering. Thus, the doctrine of Satyagraha came to signify the vindication of truth through voluntary suffering, rather than by imposing suffering upon the adversary.

- ◆ ***Truth (Satya):*** Truth is not merely factual accuracy, but moral truth, the recognition of universal values and justice. Gandhi saw truth as God, and hence the pursuit of truth was a spiritual obligation
- ◆ ***Non-Violence (Ahimsa):*** Ahimsa, as applied in Satyagraha, was not just a refusal to inflict physical harm, but also a discipline of mind, word, and deed. It demanded the purification of self and the renunciation of hatred.
- ◆ ***Self-suffering (Tapasya):*** Gandhi believed that willing self-suffering was the highest form of resistance. By accepting suffering without retaliation, the Satyagrahi could awaken the conscience of the oppressor.
- ◆ ***Fearlessness (Abhaya):*** True non-violence required immense courage. Fearlessness was vital, for one must confront injustice without hatred and without fear of consequences.
- ◆ ***Faith in the opponent's capacity to change:*** Satyagraha rests on the belief that every individual, including the oppressor, has an inner conscience that can be awakened.

Gandhi arrived in South Africa in May 1893 at the age of 24, on a one-year legal assignment to represent a Gujarati Muslim merchant, Dada Abdullah. His experiences during this short trip altered the course of his life and Indian history.



Soon after his arrival, Gandhi experienced racial discrimination firsthand. The most significant early incident occurred on 7 June 1893 at the Pietermaritzburg railway station, where he was forcibly removed from a first-class compartment despite holding a valid ticket. This humiliating event profoundly shocked Gandhi and is widely regarded as a turning point in his life. It awakened him to the realities of racial injustice and galvanised his commitment to resist such indignities - not just for himself, but for all Indians in South Africa.

In 1894, Gandhi established the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), an organisation aimed at protecting the rights of Indians in South Africa. Through petitions, legal challenges, public campaigns, and press statements, the NIC sought to mobilise Indian opinion and influence British policymakers. Gandhi's early political activities during this phase were grounded in conventional constitutional methods petitioning the colonial authorities in Natal and the British government in London.

However, Gandhi soon realised that legalistic and conciliatory approaches had limited impact against entrenched racism. This realisation prompted him to formulate a more assertive, yet ethically grounded method of resistance.

5.1.2.1. The Birth of Satyagraha

The decisive moment came in 1906 with the introduction of the Asiatic Registration Act (commonly known as the "Black Act") in the Transvaal. This law required all Indians over the age of eight to register with the authorities and carry a passbook containing personal details, including fingerprints. Failure to produce the passbook could lead to fines, imprisonment, or deportation. This legislation was dehumanising, equating Indians with criminals.

On 11 September 1906, Gandhi convened a mass meeting of the Indian community at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg. Around 3,000 Indians attended the meeting, where Gandhi proposed that instead of submitting to this unjust law, the community should resist it non-violently but with complete moral determination. It was here that the term Satyagraha was first publicly articulated.

At this meeting, many attendees, inspired by Gandhi's appeal, took a solemn religious oath to defy the law and accept the consequences with dignity. This marked the formal beginning of the first Satyagraha campaign.

5.1.2.2. First Satyagraha Campaign (1906–1908)

The first campaign involved organised defiance of the registration law:

- ◆ Indians refused to register or submit to fingerprinting.
- ◆ Gandhi and his followers publicly burned registration certificates as an act of symbolic defiance.
- ◆ Volunteers, known as Satyagrahis, courted arrest by entering prohibited areas or refusing to comply with police orders.

The British authorities responded with harsh repression - arrests, flogging, imprisonment, and deportations. Gandhi himself was arrested multiple times. Despite the repression, the movement maintained strict non-violence. Gandhi emphasised discipline, truthfulness, and moral courage.

In 1908, General Jan Smuts, a senior official in the Transvaal government, agreed to negotiate with Gandhi. A compromise was reached: Gandhi urged Indians to voluntarily register if the law was repealed. However,

when Smuts reneged and reimposed the registration law, Gandhi resumed the struggle.

5.1.2.3. Second Satyagraha Campaign (1909–1913)

The second major phase of Satyagraha was triggered by two main events:

1. The Supreme Court of South Africa's 1913 judgement invalidating non-Christian marriages, which effectively rendered most Indian marriages illegal. This was particularly offensive to Hindus and Muslims and deeply affected Indian women.
2. Continued denial of the right to trade and reside freely, along with the imposition of a £3 annual poll tax on former indentured labourers.

In response, Gandhi broadened the movement to include labourers and women. The campaign tactics included:

- I. Mass passive resistance by miners and plantation workers:
 - ◆ Organised strikes and walkouts.
 - ◆ Border crossings between Natal and Transvaal without permits.
 - ◆ Mobilisation of women, such as Kasturba Gandhi and others, to court arrest.
- II. A significant episode occurred in October 1913 when Gandhi led a march of 2,000 striking Indian mineworkers from Newcastle to the Transvaal. The marchers were arrested and subjected to severe physical hardship in prison.

Gandhi himself was arrested in November 1913 and sentenced to hard labour. Eventually, under growing pressure, the South African government entered negotiations. In 1914, the struggle concluded with the Smuts-Gandhi Agreement, which included the abolition of the poll tax, recognition of Indian marriages, and relaxation of some discriminatory immigration restrictions.

5.1.2.4. Importance of Satyagraha

Gandhi's South African experience was foundational in several ways:

1. **The birth and refinement of Satyagraha:** South Africa was the crucible in which Gandhi forged and tested his philosophy of non-violent resistance.
2. **Leadership development:** Gandhi matured from a lawyer into a mass leader, capable of organising diverse communities and sustaining long-term resistance movements.
3. **Ethical discipline:** Gandhi insisted on truthfulness, non-violence, and personal sacrifice, laying the ethical foundation for future struggles.
4. **Inclusion of marginalised groups:** Gandhi mobilised indentured labourers, women, and religious minorities, creating a broad-based social movement.
5. **Precedent for India:** Many techniques used later in the Indian

freedom struggle - marches, hunger strikes, mass arrests, and negotiation with moral force - were developed in South Africa.

5.1.3. Analysis of *Hind Swaraj* (1909)

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, written in 1909, represents a foundational text in the intellectual and political history of modern India. Composed during his sea voyage from London to South Africa, the work is structured as a dialogue between the "Editor" (Gandhi himself) and the "Reader" (a representation of a young, Western-educated Indian nationalist). Written originally in Gujarati and later translated into English, *Hind Swaraj* presents a radical critique of Western civilisation and a distinctive vision of Indian self-rule or *Swaraj*. This document lays the philosophical bedrock of Gandhi's later political campaigns and continues to offer deep insights into questions of modernity, ethics, power, and civilisation.

5.1.3.1. Critique of Modern Civilisation in *Hind Swaraj*

Gandhi's most forceful and controversial argument in *Hind Swaraj* is his rejection of modern Western civilisation, which he considered morally and spiritually bankrupt.

Materialism and the Moral Crisis

Gandhi saw modern civilisation as being excessively focused on material progress at the expense of moral development. He argued that it fostered greed, competition, and a desire for sensuous pleasure, thereby eroding ethical values and spiritual consciousness. He viewed the pursuit of wealth, consumer goods, and luxury as incompatible with the inner quest for truth and self-realisation.

Gandhi states "This civilisation is such that one has only to be patient and it will

be self-destroyed."

Machinery and Industrialisation

Gandhi critiqued the widespread belief in machinery as a symbol of progress. According to him, machines alienate people from their labour, create unemployment, and generate social inequalities. He held that while machinery might provide temporary economic gains, it ultimately impoverished both individuals and communities. "Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation; it represents a great sin."

Gandhi was particularly critical of the textile mills in Britain, which had destroyed India's indigenous handloom industry and rendered millions jobless. His advocacy of the *charkha* (spinning wheel) was not just a call for economic self-reliance but also a symbol of resistance against exploitative industrial capitalism.

Legal and Medical Professions

In his critique of the legal profession, Gandhi argued that lawyers increased litigation, promoted adversarial behaviour, and undermined the spirit of reconciliation. Similarly, he viewed modern medicine as an artificial means to prolong life without addressing the root causes of illness, such as bad habits and spiritual emptiness. Both professions, in Gandhi's view, contributed to moral decay rather than social harmony.

Modern Education

Gandhi was sharply critical of the colonial education system, which he believed distanced Indians from their own culture, languages, and ethical values. He considered it a form of cultural imperialism that produced clerks and imitators of the West rather than independent thinkers rooted in Indian ethos. "By receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation."



5.1.3.2. Gandhi's Vision of Swaraj

◆ Self-Rule Beyond Political Independence

Gandhi had a distinct interpretation of *Swaraj*. For him, self-rule was not merely about governance by Indians; more importantly, it meant governance rooted in Indian values and cultural ethos. He was not content with simply expelling the British. While this could have been achieved through an armed revolt similar to the American Revolution in 1776 or the Indian uprising of 1857, though unsuccessful Gandhi viewed the struggle differently. He believed that taking up arms to claim the rights of liberty, equality, and fraternity would not have been unjustified. However, Gandhi redefined the freedom movement as not only a fight against British rule but also as a rejection of modern Western civilisation itself.

◆ Village Republics and Decentralisation

Gandhi envisioned a decentralised polity based on self-reliant village communities (*Gram Swaraj*). He opposed centralised state power and advocated for participatory, local governance rooted in indigenous traditions. In his ideal village, people would be self-sufficient in food, clothing, education, and justice. This idea was in stark contrast to the Western model of industrial urbanisation.

◆ Ethical Politics and Satyagraha

Gandhi asserted that political means must be consistent with moral ends. Therefore, he rejected violent revolution and instead advocated for *Satyagraha* non-violent resistance based on the power of truth and moral persuasion. *Swaraj* could not be achieved through hatred or vengeance but only through spiritual purification and ethical commitment.

Recap

- ◆ Gandhi developed Satyagraha in South African struggles.
- ◆ Satyagraha means holding firmly to the truth.
- ◆ *Ahimsa* requires inner discipline and active resistance.
- ◆ *Satyagraha* emphasises self-suffering to awaken conscience.
- ◆ Truth and non-violence were Gandhi's guiding principles.
- ◆ Fearlessness and love for the opponent define *satyagrahi*.
- ◆ Gandhi rejected violence as a means to justice.
- ◆ Black Act 1906 triggered the first mass Satyagraha campaign.
- ◆ Gandhi led the public burning of registration certificates.
- ◆ Women participated actively in resistance campaigns.

- ◆ The second Satyagraha opposed anti-marriage and poll-tax laws.
- ◆ Gandhi's leadership evolved through disciplined resistance.
- ◆ South Africa was a laboratory for Gandhian methods.
- ◆ *Hind Swaraj* critiqued the moral decay of modern civilisation.
- ◆ Gandhi envisioned *Swaraj* through a model of village self-rule.

Objective Questions

1. Which country did Gandhi first develop Satyagraha in?
2. What term did Gandhi coin to describe truth-based resistance?
3. Which law triggered the first Satyagraha in 1906?
4. At which railway station was Gandhi removed from a train?
5. Which book written by Gandhi in 1909 presents his critique of modern civilization?
6. What tax was imposed on ex-indentured labourers in South Africa?
7. What quality did Gandhi equate with true non-violence?
8. Which profession did Gandhi criticise for encouraging litigation?
9. What concept signifies self-rule in Gandhi's philosophy?

Answers

1. South Africa
2. Satyagraha
3. Black Act
4. Pietermaritzburg

5. Hind Swaraj
6. Poll tax
7. Fearlessness
8. Lawyers
9. Swaraj

Assignments

1. Explain the philosophical foundations of Satyagraha as developed by Gandhi in South Africa.
2. Discuss the role of self-suffering and fearlessness in the practice of Satyagraha.
3. Evaluate the significance of the Asiatic Registration Act in the evolution of Satyagraha.
4. Critically examine Gandhi's critique of modern Western civilisation in Hind Swaraj.
5. Describe Gandhi's concept of Swaraj and its emphasis on decentralised village governance.
6. Discuss with your peers the true value of Gandhian ideology in resolving social tensions in your locality and prepare a report.

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SGOU





UNIT

Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse the origins and goals of the Khilafat Movement
- ◆ examine Gandhi's efforts for Hindu-Muslim political unity
- ◆ analyse key features of the Non-Cooperation Movement
- ◆ evaluate the impact and limitations of both movements

Prerequisite

To understand the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements, it is essential to have a basic grasp of India's socio-political climate during and after World War I. The end of the war marked a period of rising nationalist sentiment, coupled with deepening discontent against British colonial rule. Among Indian Muslims, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the fate of the Caliphate stirred strong emotions, leading to the emergence of the Khilafat Movement. Simultaneously, Indian nationalists, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, were strategising a mass-based response to colonial injustices, especially in reaction to the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

This unit builds on prior knowledge of the Indian freedom struggle and introduces the early 20th-century political developments that saw the convergence of Hindu-Muslim political interests. It explores the collaborative nature of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements, examining how Gandhi's leadership and vision brought diverse communities together under a shared anti-colonial platform. The unit also outlines the organisational aspects, mass participation, and eventual withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement, providing insights

into the transformation of the Indian National Congress into a mass political party. Lastly, learners will explore the long-term impact of these movements on India's nationalist trajectory and communal relations.

Keywords

Khilafat Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement, Ottoman Caliphate, Ali Brothers, Hindu-Muslim Unity, Indian National Congress (INC), Chauri Chaura Incident, Boycott Programme

Discussion

5.2.1. Emergence of the Khilafat Movement in India

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I was a devastating blow to Muslims worldwide. The Turkish Sultan, who also held the title of Caliph (*Khalifa*) the supreme spiritual and temporal head of Sunni Islam was regarded by Indian Muslims as the legitimate protector of Islam's holy sites and the defender of the faith. Despite the empire's political decline over the preceding century, the Caliphate retained powerful symbolic resonance in the Muslim imagination.

During the war, British officials in India, aware of Muslim sensitivities, assured Indian Muslim leaders that the holy places in Arabia and the office of the Caliph would be protected. These promises were understood as gestures to secure Muslim loyalty to the British war effort. Indeed, Indian Muslims had volunteered in large numbers to support the British in various theatres of the war. However, once the war concluded, it became clear that Britain had no intention of preserving the Ottoman Caliphate. Rather, under the terms of the

proposed *Treaty of Sèvres* (1920), the empire would be dismantled, its territories divided among the victorious Allied powers, and its political sovereignty effectively destroyed.

This perceived betrayal ignited widespread outrage among Indian Muslims. Their response coalesced in the form of the Khilafat Movement. The seeds of this movement were sown even before the final terms of the treaty were made public. As early as 1918, Muslim leaders began organising to defend the Caliphate and warned the British that any attempt to abolish or weaken it would result in severe disaffection among Indian Muslims.

5.2.2.2. The Khilafat Committee

In March 1919, the All-India Khilafat Committee was formed in Bombay under the leadership of prominent Muslim leaders. The committee served as the central coordinating body for Khilafat activities across India. It organised protests, published pamphlets, and sent delegations to Britain and other countries to plead the case for the Caliphate.



The committee brought together a wide spectrum of Indian Muslim leadership traditionalists, reformers, and nationalists. It effectively merged religious sentiment with anti-colonial nationalism, broadening its appeal among the masses. Importantly, the Khilafat Movement overlapped with the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's decision to support the Khilafat cause elevated it to a national platform and fostered unprecedented Hindu-Muslim solidarity.

The Ali brothers, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali, were the most visible and dynamic leaders of the Khilafat Movement. Educated at Aligarh and Oxford respectively, they combined Islamic scholarship with political activism and journalistic acumen. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was another towering intellectual and leader associated with the Khilafat Movement. Born in Mecca and educated in traditional Islamic sciences, Azad evolved into a nationalist and reformist thinker who advocated for Hindu-Muslim unity.

5.2.3. Gandhi's Synthesis of Hindu-Muslim Unity

Mahatma Gandhi's emergence as a mass leader in Indian politics coincided with a period of intense communal and political flux. One of his earliest and most notable political strategies was the forging of a Hindu-Muslim alliance during the Khilafat Movement (1919–1924), which sought to protest the dismemberment of the Ottoman Caliphate after World War I. For Indian Muslims, the Caliph was not only a religious figure but also a symbol of political and spiritual unity.

The All-India Khilafat Conference held in Delhi in November 1919 decided to withdraw all cooperation from the Government if their demands were not met. The Muslim League, now under the leadership of nationalists,

fully supported the National Congress and its agitation on political issues. The Congress leaders, including Lokamanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, viewed the Khilafat agitation as a golden opportunity to cement Hindu-Muslim unity and bring the Muslim masses into the national movement. They realised that different sections of the population - Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, capitalists, workers, peasants, artisans, women, youth, and tribes and peoples of different regions would join the national movement through their experiences in fighting for their respective demands and recognising that the alien regime stood in opposition to them. Gandhi regarded the Khilafat agitation as “an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Mohammedans that would not arise in a hundred years.”

Gandhi persuaded the Indian National Congress (INC) to align itself with the Khilafat cause as part of a broader Non-Cooperation Movement. He viewed Hindu-Muslim unity as a prerequisite for *swaraj* (self-rule). His ability to convince conservative Hindus to support a Muslim religious cause was unprecedented. Gandhi's fusion of religious idioms with political activism created a platform that transcended communal boundaries, at least temporarily, and galvanised mass participation in anti-colonial politics.

5.2.4. Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922)

In June 1920, an all-party conference met in Allahabad and approved a programme for the boycott of schools, colleges, and law courts. The Khilafat Committee launched a non-cooperation movement on 31 August 1920. Gandhi was the first to join, and he returned the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal awarded to him earlier for his services during the War. The Congress met in a special session in September 1920 in Calcutta. Only a few weeks earlier, Lokamanya Tilak had passed

away on 1 August at the age of 64. The Congress supported Gandhi's plan for non-cooperation with the Government until the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs were rectified and Swaraj established.

The people were asked to boycott government educational institutions, law courts, and legislatures, and to practise hand-spinning and handweaving to produce khadi. This decision to peacefully defy the Government and its laws was endorsed at the annual session of the Congress held in Nagpur in December 1920. "The British people will have to beware," declared Gandhi at Nagpur, "that if they do not want to do justice, it will be the bounden duty of every Indian to destroy the Empire." The Nagpur session also made changes to the constitution of the Congress. Provincial Congress Committees were reorganised based on linguistic areas. The Congress was now to be led by a Working Committee of 15 members, including the president and the secretaries. This structure would enable the Congress to function as a continuous political organisation and provide it with the machinery to implement its resolutions. Congress membership was opened to all men and women aged 21 or over on payment of 4 annas as an annual subscription. In 1921, the age limit for membership was reduced to 18. The Congress now changed its character.

Hindus and Muslims were marching together, shoulder to shoulder. At the same time, some of the older leaders left the Congress, discontented with the new direction the national movement had taken. They still believed in traditional methods of agitation and political work, which were strictly confined within the four walls of the law. They opposed the organisation of the masses, hartals, strikes, satyagraha, breaking of laws, courting imprisonment, and other forms of militant struggle.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, G.S. Khaparde, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Annie Besant were among the prominent leaders who left the Congress and joined national schools and colleges. It was at this time that the Jamia Millia Islamia (National Muslim University) of Aligarh, the Bihar Vidyapith, the Kashi Vidyapeeth, and the Gujarat Vidyapith came into existence. The Jamia Millia later shifted to Delhi. Acharya Narendra Dev, Dr. Zakir Husain, and Lala Lajpat Rai were among the many distinguished teachers at these national colleges and universities. Hundreds of lawyers, including Chittaranjan Das, popularly known as Deshbandhu, Motilal Nehru, and Rajendra Prasad, gave up their legal practice.

The Tilak Swarajya Fund was started to finance the non-cooperation movement, and within six months, over 1 crore of rupees were subscribed. Women showed great enthusiasm and freely offered their jewellery. Huge bonfires of foreign cloth were organised all over the country. In May 1921, the All-India Khilafat Committee passed a resolution declaring that no Muslim should serve in the British Indian army. In September, the Ali brothers were arrested. Immediately, Gandhiji called for the repetition of this resolution at hundreds of meetings. Fifty members of the All-India Congress Committee issued a similar declaration that no Indian should serve a government that degraded India socially, economically, and politically. The Congress Working Committee then issued a similar statement. The Congress now decided to raise the movement to a higher level. It permitted the Congress Committee of a province to start civil disobedience or disobedience of British laws, including non-payment of taxes, if it believed the people were ready for it. The Government once again resorted to repression.

The Congress and Khilafat volunteers, who had begun to drill together and thus



unite Hindu and Muslim political workers at lower levels, were declared illegal. By the end of 1921, all important nationalist leaders, except Gandhi, were behind bars along with 3,000 others. In November 1921, huge demonstrations greeted the Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne, during his tour of India. He had been asked by the Government to come to India to encourage loyalty among the people and the princes. In Bombay, the Government tried to suppress the demonstrations, killing 53 persons and wounding about 400 more. The annual session of the Congress, meeting at Ahmedabad in December 1921, passed a resolution affirming “the fixed determination of the Congress to continue the programme of non-violent non-cooperation with greater vigour than hitherto until the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs are redressed and Swarajya is established.”

5.2.5. Widespread Participation

The Non-Cooperation Movement (NCM) witnessed an unprecedented mass awakening and participation across social classes, professions, religious communities, castes, and regions. For the first time, Indian nationalism moved from urban elite circles to the heart of India's villages, towns, and bazaars. The movement succeeded in mobilising people across the subcontinent, although the nature and reasons for participation varied significantly across social groups and regions.

5.2.5.1 Students and Youth

The participation of students was one of the most visible successes of the movement. Thousands of students responded to Gandhi's call to boycott government and missionary schools and colleges. Between 1920 and 1922, over 95,000 students reportedly withdrew from official institutions across India.

- ◆ In Bengal, the boycott was particularly successful, with students leaving institutions like Presidency College and Calcutta University.
- ◆ In Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, students established alternative nationalist educational institutions such as the National College in Lahore (where Bhagat Singh was a student) and the Kashi Vidyapeeth in Banaras.
- ◆ Jamia Millia Islamia, founded in 1920 in Aligarh and later shifted to Delhi, was one of the premier institutions born out of this movement, promoting nationalist and Islamic education in harmony.

Students often took on leadership roles in their localities, organising picketing campaigns against foreign cloth shops and liquor stores. Their activism helped spread political consciousness among their families and communities.

5.2.5.2 Lawyers and Legal Professionals

Following Gandhi's example, prominent lawyers gave up their legal practices as a symbolic protest against colonial rule.

- ◆ Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Saifuddin Kitchlew, and Asaf Ali were among the leading barristers who renounced their careers.
- ◆ In cities like Allahabad, Calcutta, Lahore, and Patna, the withdrawal of lawyers disrupted the functioning of British courts and drew significant attention.

However, the boycott among lawyers was

not uniform. While leaders like Gandhi saw law courts as complicit in colonial repression, others within the profession were hesitant due to economic reasons. By 1922, many resumed their practices, and this divergence led to ideological splits within the Congress in subsequent years.

5.2.5.3 Peasantry and Agrarian Communities

Perhaps the most consequential participation came from India's vast rural population. The Non-Cooperation Movement provided a vocabulary for peasants to express long-standing grievances related to land revenue, tenancy rights, and landlord exploitation. Gandhi's rhetoric of *swaraj* and oppression resonated deeply with these communities.

- ◆ In Awadh (Oudh), the peasant movement led by Baba Ramchandra became entwined with the Non-Cooperation Movement. The Oudh Kisan Sabha, supported by Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Gauri Shankar Mishra, organised massive demonstrations demanding a reduction in rent (*lagan*), abolition of *begar* (forced labour), and tenant rights.
- ◆ In the Kheda and Bardoli regions of Gujarat, earlier movements for tax relief under Gandhi's leadership had already politicised the peasants, who now supported Non-Cooperation enthusiastically.
- ◆ In Bihar, under leaders like Sri Krishna Sinha, peasants protested against zamindari excesses and British administrative coercion.
- ◆ In Andhra Pradesh, particularly in the tribal regions of the Godavari

and Visakhapatnam districts, the movement took a more militant turn. Led by Alluri Sitarama Raju, tribal peasants interpreted Gandhi's call for resistance in their own idiom, leading to attacks on British outposts.

Importantly, many peasants saw the movement as a means of addressing their immediate material concerns. While Gandhi's emphasis was on nonviolence and self-purification, rural mobilisations often acquired an anti-landlord and anti-police dimension, sometimes turning violent.

5.2.5.4 Urban Middle Classes, Merchants, and Traders

The urban middle classes, including school teachers, clerks, and small professionals, played an active role in organising hartals (general strikes), swadeshi campaigns, and picketing. Gandhi's emphasis on khadi and the boycott of foreign goods found widespread support among shopkeepers and traders.

- ◆ In major cities like Bombay (Mumbai), Ahmedabad, Calcutta (Kolkata), Madras (Chennai), and Delhi, commercial establishments participated in hartals.
- ◆ In Surat, Ahmedabad, and Amritsar, local merchants stopped selling foreign cloth, leading to huge bonfires of imported textiles.
- ◆ The Marwari and Bania trading communities supported the swadeshi movement by funding nationalist schools, distributing khadi, and contributing to the Tilak Swaraj Fund.

However, the enthusiasm of these groups waned after 1921 when the economic losses due to prolonged strikes and boycotts began



to hurt their businesses. Moreover, increasing violence in some regions alienated these constituencies, who preferred moderate constitutional methods.

5.2.5.5 Women's Participation

Though still limited compared to later movements, the Non-Cooperation Movement marked the beginning of women's formal involvement in Indian nationalist politics.

- ◆ Women like Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Basanti Devi, and Kasturba Gandhi led processions, addressed public gatherings, and participated in picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops.
- ◆ In Calcutta, Basanti Devi's arrest while leading a women's march galvanised public sentiment and underscored the changing role of women in nationalist politics.
- ◆ In Gujarat, women in rural areas joined spinning activities, supported khadi production, and participated in symbolic acts of civil resistance.

While social norms still constrained their mass mobilisation, this period laid the groundwork for much broader female participation in the Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements.

5.2.5.6 Industrial Workers

Compared to the peasantry and middle classes, the industrial proletariat was less uniformly mobilised, though they did participate in specific instances.

- ◆ In Bombay, workers from textile mills took part in hartals and swadeshi protests.

- ◆ In Madras and Calcutta, dockworkers and railway employees joined strikes, sometimes in solidarity with nationalist causes and sometimes for their own economic grievances.

- ◆ The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), formed in 1920, included Congress leaders among its founders, signalling a growing awareness of the working class as a political force.

However, Gandhi was cautious about labour militancy and discouraged class warfare. As a result, worker participation remained localised and often independent of Congress directives.

5.2.5.7 Dalits and Marginalised Castes

Participation from Dalit communities was sporadic and regionally varied. Gandhi attempted to integrate Dalits (whom he called "Harijans" or children of God) into the movement through his call for the removal of untouchability. However, his efforts were met with limited success during this phase.

- ◆ Some Dalits joined the movement as volunteers and participants in khadi and swadeshi programmes, particularly in western India.
- ◆ However, leaders like B.R. Ambedkar remained critical of Gandhi's approach, arguing that Dalit emancipation required structural socio-economic reform, not just moral appeals.

Nonetheless, the movement opened up limited new avenues for Dalit involvement in nationalist politics, even if full integration remained incomplete.

5.2.6. The Chauri Chaura Incident

This mood of struggle was soon transformed into retreat. On 5 February, a Congress procession of 3,000 peasants in Chauri Chaura, a village in the Gorakhpur District of U.P., was fired upon by the police. The angry crowd attacked and burnt the police station, causing the death of 22 policemen. Gandhiji took a very serious view of this incident. It convinced him that the nationalist workers had not yet properly understood nor learnt the practice of nonviolence, without which, he was convinced, civil disobedience could not be a success. Apart from the fact that he would have nothing to do with violence, he also perhaps believed that the British would be able to easily crush a violent movement, for people had not yet built up enough strength to resist government repression. He therefore decided to suspend the nationalist campaign.

The Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli in Gujarat on 12 February and passed a resolution stopping all activities that would lead to the breaking of laws. It urged Congressmen to donate their time to the constructive programme—popularisation of the charkha, national schools, and temperance. The Bardoli resolution stunned the country and had a mixed reception among the nationalists. While some had implicit faith in Gandhiji, others resented this decision to retreat.

5.2.7. Impact and Significance of the Movement

- ◆ **Mobilisation of the Masses:** The Non-Cooperation Movement laid the foundation for mass participation in Indian politics. For the first time, the Congress was seen not merely as a party of lawyers and professionals but as a people's movement. The rural poor, students, women,

and workers became part of the nationalist discourse.

- ◆ **Reinforcement of Non-violence Political Doctrine** Though controversial, Gandhi's decision to withdraw reaffirmed his unwavering commitment to nonviolence. This gave Indian nationalism a distinct moral character that set it apart from contemporary revolutionary movements across Asia and Africa.
- ◆ **Shift in British Colonial Policy** The movement revealed the fragility of British control over India. Although it was suppressed, the British government took the discontent seriously, leading to efforts at constitutional reform, such as the Simon Commission (1927) and the Round Table Conferences (1930–32), albeit still within imperialist frameworks.
- ◆ **Hindu-Muslim Unity and its Limits:** While the Khilafat alliance represented a high point in Hindu-Muslim unity, its collapse after the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924 and rising communal tensions in the late 1920s exposed the fragility of this coalition. Nonetheless, Gandhi's experiment underscored the political potential of inter-religious solidarity.
- ◆ **Precedent for Future Movements:** The organisational methods, mass outreach strategies, and ideological emphasis on swaraj and swadeshi set precedents for later movements - Civil Disobedience (1930) and Quit India (1942). Gandhi's vision of combining ethical politics with grassroots mobilisation continued to shape Indian nationalism.



Recap

- ◆ Ottoman Caliphate held symbolic importance for Indian Muslims.
- ◆ Treaty of Sèvres dismantled the Ottoman Empire post-WWI.
- ◆ Indian Muslims were alarmed by British betrayal on the Caliphate.
- ◆ Khilafat Movement emerged to defend the Ottoman Caliph.
- ◆ British promises on the Caliphate ultimately proved false.
- ◆ Khilafat Committee united diverse Muslim political ideologies.
- ◆ Gandhi supported Khilafat to foster Hindu-Muslim unity.
- ◆ Congress saw Khilafat as a chance for unity.
- ◆ Non-Cooperation was launched with a boycott of institutions and goods.
- ◆ Gandhi returned medals and promoted Khadi and the Charkha.
- ◆ Congress was restructured, opening membership to the Indian masses.
- ◆ Non-Cooperation saw unprecedented nationwide mass participation.
- ◆ Women played early roles in nationalist protests.
- ◆ Dalits' participation was limited and region-specific.
- ◆ Chauri Chaura violence led Gandhi to suspend the movement.

Objective Questions

1. Which treaty dismembered the Ottoman Empire post-WWI?
2. What movement emerged to support the Ottoman Caliph?
3. In which Indian city was the Khilafat Committee founded?
4. Which leader called the Khilafat a unifying opportunity?
5. Where was the special Congress session of 1920 held?
6. Which medal did Gandhi return during Non-Cooperation?
7. What university was founded during the Non-Cooperation phase?

8. Who led the peasant movement in Awadh?
9. Which incident led to the suspension of the Non-Cooperation movement?
10. Where did the Congress pass the Bardoli resolution?

Answers

1. Sèvres
2. Khilafat
3. Bombay
4. Gandhi
5. Calcutta
6. Kaiser-i-Hind
7. Jamia Millia
8. Baba Ramchandra
9. Chauri Chaura
10. Bardoli

Assignments

1. Discuss the symbolic and political significance of the Ottoman Caliphate for Indian Muslims post-World War I.
2. Analyse the emergence and objectives of the Khilafat Movement in India. How did it contribute to the growth of anti-colonial nationalism?
3. Evaluate Gandhi's role in forging Hindu-Muslim unity during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements.
4. Explain the extent and nature of participation in the Non-Cooperation Movement across different social groups in India.
5. Critically assess the reasons behind the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement after the Chauri Chaura incident.



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UNIT

Civil Disobedience Movement

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ develop competency in understanding the basic assumptions in the civil disobedience strategies of Gandhi
- ♦ understand the causes and impact of the Civil Disobedience Movement
- ♦ analyse the significance of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact
- ♦ evaluate the provisions and critique of the Government of India Act 1935

Prerequisite

Following the successes and limitations of the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), the Indian National Congress, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, continued to push for complete independence from British rule. The growing dissatisfaction with the Simon Commission (1927), which included no Indian representatives, and the declaration of Purna Swaraj in 1930 laid the foundation for the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34) marked a crucial phase in India's nationalist struggle. It began with the symbolic Dandi March and Salt Satyagraha, directly challenging British authority. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931 temporarily halted the movement and led to Gandhi's participation in the Second Round Table Conference, although it failed to yield substantial results. The movement faced severe repression but saw widespread participation across regions and social classes.

The Communal Award of 1932, introduced by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and proposing separate electorates for various communities, including

Dalits, sparked strong opposition from Gandhi, who feared it would divide Hindu society. His fast unto death led to the historic Poona Pact, a compromise between Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The Pact remains significant in debates around caste, representation, and social justice. The Government of India Act of 1935 was the most comprehensive constitutional reform introduced by the British. It established provincial autonomy and a federal structure but was criticised for falling short of granting full self-rule. Understanding this act is crucial for tracing the constitutional developments leading up to India's independence in 1947. This unit thus explores the interplay between mass movements, caste politics, and constitutional reform in colonial India.

Keywords

Civil Disobedience, Salt Satyagraha, Dandi March, Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Round Table Conferences, Communal Award, Poona Pact, Government of India Act 1935

Discussion

5.3.1. Background to the Movement

The political climate in the late 1920s was marked by growing impatience with British intransigence. The Simon Commission's appointment in 1927, with no Indian representation, triggered widespread protests. The Nehru Report (1928) and Jinnah's 14 Points (1929) failed to create a consensus on constitutional reform. The Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress in December 1929, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, passed the historic "Purna Swaraj" (complete independence) resolution. January 26, 1930, was declared Independence Day and marked by celebrations and symbolic defiance across India.

With the Dominion Status goal abandoned, Gandhi was authorised to launch a new movement at a time and manner of his choosing. He chose the salt laws as the focal point, recognising their symbolic and

practical relevance.

Salt was a basic necessity and was heavily taxed by the British, who maintained a state monopoly over its production and sale. Gandhi's choice of salt was strategic: it was a commodity that affected every Indian, particularly the poor. Violating the salt law would directly challenge the economic logic of British rule while uniting Indians across class, caste, and gender.

5.3.2. The March to Dandi

The Civil Disobedience Movement was initiated by Gandhi on 12 March 1930 with his famous Dandi March. Together with 78 chosen followers, Gandhi walked nearly 200 miles from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, a village on the Gujarat sea-coast. Here, Gandhi and his followers made salt in violation of the salt laws. This act was a symbol of the Indian people's refusal to live under British-made laws and, therefore, under British rule. Gandhi declared:

The British rule in India has brought about moral, material, cultural, and spiritual ruination of this great country, I regard this rule as a curse. I am out to destroy this system or Government. Sedition has become my religion. Ours is a nonviolent battle. We are not to kill anybody but it is our dharma to see that the curse of this Government is blotted out.

5.3.3. Spread of the Movements

The movement now spread rapidly. Everywhere in the country, people joined hartals, demonstrations, and the campaign to boycott foreign goods and refuse to pay taxes. Lakhs of Indians offered passive resistance. In many parts of the country, the peasants withheld payment of land revenue and rent. A notable feature of the movement was the wide participation of women. Thousands of them left the seclusion of their homes and offered *Satyagraha*. They took an active part in picketing shops selling foreign cloth or liquor. They marched shoulder to shoulder with the men in processions. The movement reached the extreme north-western corner of India and stirred the brave and hardy Pathans. Under the leadership of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as “the Frontier Gandhi,” the Pathans organised the society of Khudai Khidmatgars (or Servants of God), known popularly as Red Shirts. They were pledged to non-violence and the freedom struggle. Another noteworthy incident occurred in Peshawar at this time. Two platoons of Garhwali soldiers refused to open fire on mass demonstrators, even though it meant facing court martial and long terms of imprisonment. This episode showed that nationalism was beginning to penetrate the Indian army, the chief instrument of British rule.

5.3.4. Participation of Different Sections

5.3.4.1 Women’s Participation

One of the most profound outcomes of the Salt Satyagraha was the large-scale involvement of women in public political action. For the first time in the freedom struggle, women came out in significant numbers, challenging both colonial authority and entrenched patriarchal norms. Inspired by Gandhi’s call, women across caste and class lines participated in making salt, picketing foreign cloth and liquor shops, and offering Satyagraha at government offices.

Sarojini Naidu, a senior Congress leader and poet, took charge of the Dharasana Salt Works protest after Gandhi’s arrest. Along with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Manilal Gandhi, she led hundreds of *satyagrahis* who were brutally beaten by police while trying to enter the salt depot. American journalist Webb Miller’s vivid reporting of the beatings in which not a single *satyagrahi* retaliated galvanised international public opinion against British colonial rule.

Other prominent women, like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Muthulakshmi Reddy, and Perin Captain, organised female-led satyagrahas in cities like Madras, Bombay, and Ahmedabad. In Calcutta, young women such as Basanti Devi and members of the Mahila Sanghas took to the streets. In rural Maharashtra, peasant women participated in forest satyagrahas and salt production.

5.3.4.2 Peasants and the Rural Masses

The resonance of the salt issue among peasants was immediate and widespread. In the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, and parts of Punjab, rural folk produced

mill workers responded positively to the Congress call for hartals (strikes) and participated in processions and picketing campaigns. However, the movement's orientation remained largely nationalist rather than class-based, and labour unions were cautious in aligning with Congress due to differing ideological priorities. Nevertheless, several labour strikes during this period aligned with the nationalist agenda and contributed to the overall disruption of colonial normalcy.

5.3.4.5 Dalits and Marginalised Communities

The participation of Dalits and marginalised communities varied across regions. In many cases, Gandhi's personal outreach to the Depressed Classes, especially his symbolic acts of including Dalits in satyagraha training and inviting them to live in the Sabarmati Ashram, led to limited but significant engagement. In Tamil Nadu, Dalits participated in salt marches alongside caste Hindus. However, structural caste barriers and internal opposition from upper-caste Congress leaders often restricted their wider involvement. Moreover, leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar remained sceptical of the Congress's commitment to social reform and thus distanced themselves from the movement.

5.3.5. The British Response

The colonial state responded with calculated and often brutal repression. Over 60,000 people were arrested in the first year of the movement alone. The British cracked down on salt depots, destroyed illegal salt pans, and used lathi charges and tear gas against demonstrators. The press was censored, and nationalist literature was banned.

Over 90,000 Satyagrahis, including Gandhi and other Congress leaders, were

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imprisoned. The Congress was declared illegal. The nationalist press was silenced through strict censorship of news. According to official figures, over 110 individuals were killed and over 300 wounded in police firings. Unofficial estimates place the number of dead far higher. Moreover, thousands of individuals had their heads and bones broken in lathi charges. South India, in particular, experienced repression in its most severe form.

5.3.6. Round Table Conferences (1930–1932)

5.3.6.1 First Round Table Conference (1930)

Held in London in 1930, the first Round Table Conference brought together Indian leaders and spokesmen of the British Government to discuss the Simon Commission Report. However, the National Congress boycotted the Conference, and its proceedings proved abortive. The Government now made attempts to negotiate an agreement with the Congress so that it would attend the Round Table Conference. Finally, Lord Irwin and Gandhi negotiated a settlement in March 1931. The Government agreed to release those political prisoners who had remained non-violent, while the Congress suspended the Civil Disobedience Movement and agreed to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. Many Congress leaders, particularly from the younger, left-wing section, opposed the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, believing that the Government had not accepted even one of the major nationalist demands.

5.3.6.2 Gandhi-Irwin Pact (March 1931)

By the end of 1930, the British government was facing increasing criticism, both at home and abroad, for its harsh response. Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, opened a dialogue with

Gandhi. The result was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, signed on March 5, 1931.

Terms of the Pact

The Congress agreed to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement and participate in the Second Round Table Conference. In return, the British agreed to:

- ◆ Release all political prisoners not involved in violence.
- ◆ Permit peaceful picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops.
- ◆ Withdraw ordinances and end repression.
- ◆ Return confiscated properties of *Satyagrahis*
- ◆ Permit Indians to manufacture and sell salt in coastal areas.

While the pact was hailed as a major breakthrough, it was not without criticism. Several revolutionaries and youth leaders, including Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, felt the terms were inadequate and that Gandhi had conceded too much. The pact also excluded the release of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev, who were executed on March 23, 1931 - a decision that inflamed nationalist sentiments.

Nevertheless, the pact marked the first time the British negotiated directly with the Congress as an equal political force, signifying a recognition of the Congress's mass appeal and Gandhi's personal authority.

5.3.6.3 Second Round Table Conference (1931)

Gandhi attended this conference as the sole representative of the Congress. Held between September and December 1931, the conference ended in failure. The British, led by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald,



gave undue prominence to the communal question. Separate electorates for minorities, including Muslims and Dalits, were proposed a step Gandhi strongly opposed, especially in the case of Dalits, fearing it would further divide Hindu society.

Gandhi's appeals for dominion status and responsible government were met with stiff resistance, particularly from British Conservatives and Indian communalists. Disappointed with the lack of substantive gains, Gandhi returned to India.

After the failure of the Round Table Conference, Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress were arrested again, and the Congress was declared illegal. The normal functioning of laws was suspended, and the administration continued through special ordinances. The police indulged in naked terror and committed innumerable atrocities against the freedom fighters. Over a lakh of *satyagrahis* were arrested; the lands, houses, and other property of thousands were confiscated. Nationalist literature was banned, while nationalist newspapers were once again placed under censorship. Government repression ultimately succeeded, aided by the differences among Indian leaders on communal and other issues. The Civil Disobedience Movement gradually waned, and political enthusiasm gave way to frustration and depression. The Congress officially suspended the movement in May 1933 and withdrew it in May 1934. Gandhi once again withdrew from active politics, and Congress membership dropped to less than five lakhs.

5.3.7. The Communal Award and Gandhi's Fast

On 16 August 1932, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced the Communal Award, a decision that extended separate electorates already granted to

Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans to the Depressed Classes. The decision was intended to ensure adequate political representation for the socially and economically marginalised sections of Indian society, based on the recommendations of the Indian franchise committee chaired by Lord Lothian.

The most controversial element of the Communal Award was the proposal to allow the Depressed Classes to elect their representatives separately, in "reserved" constituencies from which other Hindus would be excluded. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who had emerged as the most prominent political representative of the Dalits, welcomed the Award, seeing separate electorates as a crucial tool to ensure genuine political empowerment for his community, which had long suffered from untouchability, exclusion, and systemic oppression.

In contrast, Mahatma Gandhi vehemently opposed the notion of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. For Gandhi, this provision threatened to permanently divide Hindu society. He viewed it as a mechanism that would "vivisection and disrupt" Hinduism, weakening its moral and social unity. Gandhi feared that such fragmentation would not only undermine the anti-colonial struggle but also impede the possibility of future reforms for Dalit upliftment from within the Hindu fold.

In protest, Gandhi announced a fast unto death, beginning on 20 September 1932, while imprisoned in Yerwada Central Jail, Pune. This declaration created a nationwide crisis, mobilising massive public opinion and forcing political leaders, social reformers, and religious figures to take immediate steps to avert a moral and political catastrophe.

5.3.7.1. The Poona Pact: Provisions and Terms

Under intense pressure to resolve the impasse and prevent Gandhi's death, a series of negotiations were initiated between Dr. Ambedkar and Congress leaders, including Madan Mohan Malaviya, C. Rajagopalachari, and Tej Bahadur Sapru. These discussions, held over several days in Pune, were marked by ideological disagreement and political urgency. Dr. Ambedkar was not initially inclined to compromise, as he saw separate electorates as a minimal safeguard for the political agency of the Dalits. However, faced with the moral and political repercussions of Gandhi's possible death - and under considerable pressure from liberal Hindu public opinion - Ambedkar ultimately agreed to modify the terms. The final agreement, signed on 24 September 1932 by Dr. Ambedkar and representatives of the caste Hindu leadership (including Pandit Malaviya), laid out the following major provisions:

◆ Joint Electorates:

Instead of separate electorates, the Depressed Classes would vote in joint electorates with caste Hindus. However, a certain number of seats in provincial legislatures would be reserved exclusively for candidates from the Depressed Classes.

◆ Increased Representation:

The Pact increased the number of reserved seats for the Depressed Classes from 71 (as proposed under the Communal Award) to 148 in British Indian provinces. This was a significant enhancement in terms of numerical representation.

◆ Primary Elections:

A unique mechanism was included whereby the Depressed Classes would, through a primary election (i.e., a form of

separate preliminary voting), select four candidates for each reserved seat. The final candidate would be elected from among these four in the joint electorate.

◆ Provision for Representation in Services and Education:

The Pact committed to fair representation for the Depressed Classes in public services and to the allocation of sufficient funds for their education, to be provided by the state and managed with the help of Depressed Class representatives.

◆ Recognition of Social Disabilities:

The Pact recognised the need to remove untouchability and other social disabilities and called for joint efforts by all communities to eradicate such practices.

5.3.8. The Government of India Act, 1935

In 1927, the British government appointed the Simon Commission to review the working of the 1919 reforms. Its all-white composition led to its wholesale boycott across the Indian political spectrum. The widespread protests, including Lala Lajpat Rai's martyrdom, underlined the inadequacy of British constitutional methods. This impasse led to the Round Table Conferences (1930–1932), convened in London, which sought to engage Indian leaders in framing a new constitutional settlement. While these conferences resulted in some consensus among British officials, Indian nationalists, particularly the Congress, remained dissatisfied.

The British government's response was the publication of a White Paper in 1933, summarising the proposals discussed at the Round Table Conferences. These proposals were transformed into a draft bill, and after extensive parliamentary debate, the Government of India Act, 1935, was passed



- ◆ Separate electorates were continued for religious and other minorities, including Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans, in line with the Communal Award of 1932.

- ◆ The powers of the Governor-General at the centre and provincial Governors were significantly expanded, allowing them to act with discretion, override elected governments, and exercise emergency powers.

- ◆ The Act abolished the Indian Council, which had advised the Secretary of State for India, replacing it with advisors directly appointed by the British government.

- ◆ A Federal Court of India was established in Delhi to adjudicate disputes between governments and interpret the constitution; it had original, appellate, and advisory jurisdiction.

- ◆ The provinces of Sindh and Orissa were created by separating them from the Bombay Presidency and Bihar Province, respectively.

- ◆ Burma was separated from British India and made a Crown Colony effective from April 1, 1937, and Aden was also detached from India.

- ◆ Bicameral legislatures were introduced in six provinces Bengal, Bombay, Madras, Bihar, Assam, and the United Provinces while others remained unicameral.

- ◆ Public Service Commissions were institutionalised at both federal and provincial levels to oversee recruitment and personnel matters



for civil services.

- ◆ The Act empowered the British Parliament and the Secretary of State for India to retain ultimate control over Indian affairs, maintaining colonial supremacy despite the devolution of powers on paper.

5.3.8.2 Criticism from Indian Nationalists

The Indian National Congress, while keenly aware of the expanded administrative space offered at the provincial level, was profoundly critical of the Act's underlying structure and implications. The Congress characterised the Act as a façade of reform that entrenched imperial control under the illusion of federalism. Central to their critique was the fact that at the federal level, no responsible government was instituted. The Governor-General, who represented the Crown, retained overriding powers to legislate, veto, and act at his own discretion on matters of defence, external affairs, and finance. He was not accountable to any legislature or Indian representative body.

The Congress ministries could obviously not change the fundamentally imperialist character of British administration in India, and they failed to introduce a radical era. However, they did try to improve the conditions of the people within the narrow limits of the powers given to them under the Act of 1935. The Congress ministers reduced their own salaries drastically to Rs. 500 per month. Most of them travelled second or third class on the railways. They set up new standards of honesty and public service. They paid greater attention to primary, technical, and higher education, as well as public health. They helped the peasants by passing anti-usury and tenancy legislation. They promoted civil liberties. Political prisoners were released, and freedom of the press was enhanced. Trade unions felt freer and were able to win wage increases for workers. The largest gain was psychological. People felt as if they were breathing the air of victory and self-government, for was it not a great achievement that men who were in prison until the other day were now ruling in the secretariat? The period between 1935 and 1939 witnessed several other important political developments that, in a way, marked a new turn in the nationalist movement and the Congress.

Recap

- ◆ Gandhi began Civil Disobedience with the Dandi March.
- ◆ The Dandi March symbolised defiance of British salt laws.
- ◆ The movement spread nationwide through hartals and protests.
- ◆ Women participated actively in picketing and marches.
- ◆ Pathans formed the Red Shirts under Frontier Gandhi.
- ◆ Garhwali soldiers refused to fire on demonstrators.



- ◆ The First Round Table Conference failed without Congress participation.
- ◆ The Gandhi-Irwin Pact suspended the movement and released prisoners.
- ◆ The Second Round Table Conference ended in disappointment.
- ◆ Gandhi opposed separate electorates for the Depressed Classes.
- ◆ The Communal Award proposed separate electorates for Dalits.
- ◆ Ambedkar supported separate electorates for empowerment.
- ◆ The Poona Pact ensured joint electorates and reserved seats.
- ◆ The Government of India Act 1935 introduced provincial autonomy.
- ◆ The Act continued separate electorates and extended the franchise.

Objective Questions

1. From which ashram did Gandhi start the march?
2. What movement followed the Dandi March?
3. Who led the Red Shirts in the northwest?
4. Where were the Round Table Conferences held?
5. What pact led to Gandhi attending the Second RTC?
6. In which year was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact signed?
7. Who announced the Communal Award?
8. Which leader supported separate electorates for Dalits?
9. What agreement replaced the Communal Award?
10. In what year was the Poona Pact signed?

Answers

1. Sabarmati
2. Civil Disobedience
3. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan
4. London
5. Gandhi-Irwin
6. 1931
7. Ramsay MacDonald
8. Ambedkar
9. Poona Pact
10. 1932

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of the Dandi March in the launch and popularisation of the Civil Disobedience Movement.
2. Analyse the role of women and frontier regions like the North-West in the spread of the Civil Disobedience Movement.
3. Evaluate the impact of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the Second Round Table Conference on the Indian national movement.
4. Critically examine the Communal Award and the Poona Pact in the context of Dalit political representation.
5. Explain the key provisions and limitations of the Government of India Act, 1935, in addressing Indian nationalist aspirations.

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UNIT

Left-Wing Movements

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the emergence and evolution of socialist ideas
- ◆ analyse the founding and ideology of the Communist Party
- ◆ examine early conspiracy movements and the formation of CSP
- ◆ explore major trade union and Kisan Sabha movements

Prerequisite

To understand the rise of Left-Wing Movements in India, it is essential to examine the broader historical, political, and economic context of the early 20th century. This period witnessed growing disillusionment with British colonial rule, especially among sections of the Indian population affected by economic exploitation, social inequality, and political repression. The spread of socialist and Marxist ideas across the world, particularly following the success of the Russian Revolution in 1917, had a profound impact on Indian intellectuals, workers, and peasants. These ideas emphasised class struggle, workers' rights, and the abolition of exploitative capitalist systems, resonating deeply with the conditions prevailing in colonial India.

The formation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) marked a critical juncture in Indian political history. Influenced by international communist movements and inspired by the ideological roots of Marxism-Leninism, the CPI aimed to mobilise the working class and peasants against imperialism and capitalism. Simultaneously, early conspiracy movements like the Ghadar Movement and efforts by revolutionaries sought to challenge colonial authority through militant means, laying the foundation

for a more organised leftist political structure.

The establishment of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within the Indian National Congress also reflected the growing appeal of socialist ideologies among nationalist leaders who aimed to align the freedom movement with the struggles of the masses. Meanwhile, the rise of trade union movements such as the Madras Labour Union (1918), Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (1920), and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) (1920) demonstrated the increasing consciousness and mobilisation of industrial workers. The Kisan Sabha movement further signified the growing unrest among the peasantry, leading to organised resistance against feudal exploitation and colonial agrarian policies. These movements laid the foundation for a robust and ideologically driven Leftist tradition in Indian politics.

Keywords

Socialist Ideas, Communist Party of India, Ideological Roots, Conspiracy Movements, Congress Socialist Party, Trade Union Movements, Madras Labour Union, Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, All India Trade Union Congress, Kisan Sabha Movement

Discussion

5.4.1. Growth of Socialist Ideas

The 1930s witnessed the rapid growth of socialist ideas within and outside the Congress. In 1929, there was a significant economic slump or depression in the United States that gradually spread to the rest of the world. Everywhere in capitalist countries, there was a steep decline in production and foreign trade, resulting in economic distress and large-scale unemployment. At one time, the number of unemployed reached 3 million in Britain, 6 million in Germany, and 12 million in the United States. In contrast, the economic situation in the Soviet Union was entirely different. Not only was there no slump, but the years between 1929 and 1936 witnessed the successful completion of the first two Five-Year Plans, which increased Soviet industrial production by more than four times.

The world depression, therefore, brought the capitalist system into disrepute and drew attention towards Marxism, socialism, and economic planning. Consequently, socialist ideas began to attract more and more people, especially the young, the workers, and the peasants. The economic depression also worsened the conditions of the peasants and workers in India. By the end of 1932, the prices of agricultural products had dropped by over 50 per cent. Employers attempted to reduce wages.

Peasants across the country began to demand land reforms, the abolition of *zamindari*, reductions in land revenue and rent, and relief from indebtedness. Workers in factories and plantations increasingly demanded better working conditions and recognition of their trade union rights. The peasants also began to take a more active part in the national movement. Within

the Congress, the left-wing tendency was reflected in the election of Jawaharlal Nehru as president for 1936 and 1937 and Subhash Chandra Bose for 1938 and 1939. In his presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in 1936, Nehru urged the Congress to accept socialism as its goal and to bring itself closer to the peasantry and the working class.

A second major development during the period 1935-1939 was the increasing interest the Congress took in world affairs. From its inception in 1885, the Congress had opposed the use of the Indian army and India's resources to serve British interests in Africa and Asia. In February 1927, Jawaharlal Nehru, on behalf of the National Congress, attended the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels, organised by political exiles and revolutionaries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America who were suffering from economic or political imperialism. The Congress aimed to coordinate and plan their common struggle against imperialism.

In the 1930s, the Congress took a firm stand against imperialism in any part of the world and supported national movements in Asia and Africa. It condemned Fascism, which was rising at the time in Italy, Germany, and Japan, as the most extreme form of imperialism and racialism, and gave full support to the people of Ethiopia, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and China in their fight against aggression by the fascist powers.

The third major development during this period was the spread of the national movement to the princely states. Appalling economic, political, and social conditions prevailed in most of them. Peasants were oppressed; land revenue and taxation were excessive and unbearable; education was retarded; health and other social services were extremely backward; and freedom of the press and other civil rights hardly existed. The bulk of the state revenues was spent on the luxuries of the princes. In several

states, serfdom, slavery, and forced labour flourished.

5.4.2. Formation of Communist Party of India

The Communist Party of India (CPI), founded in 1925 at Kanpur, played a pivotal role in shaping India's left-wing political discourse. Its early history is marked not only by ideological development and class-based activism but also by its entanglement in a series of conspiracy cases that reflected the colonial government's anxiety about communist influence in India.

The CPI emerged against the backdrop of global events such as the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, which inspired anti-colonial and socialist movements across Asia and Africa. Indian revolutionaries, particularly those in exile, were heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideas. Among the key figures in the early formation of the party were M.N. Roy, Abani Mukherjee, and S.A. Dange. M.N. Roy, notably, had established contacts with the Communist International (Comintern) and helped build networks between Indian revolutionaries and international communist organisations.

The party, though officially formed in 1925, had informal roots in earlier worker and peasant movements and in the political activities of Indian revolutionaries who had fled British persecution to Soviet Russia or other sympathetic countries. Initially, the CPI was banned in British India, forcing it to operate underground or through affiliated front organisations like trade unions and peasant associations.

5.4.3. Early Conspiracy Movements

The British colonial state responded to the growing influence of communism with repression, including high-profile trials



intended to criminalise Marxist ideology and dismantle the emerging communist networks in India. Among the most significant were the Peshawar Conspiracy Case, the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case, and the Meerut Conspiracy Case. These trials, while aimed at suppressing communism, ironically helped spread awareness of Marxist ideas among the Indian public.

Peshawar Conspiracy Case (1922–1927)

This was one of the earliest cases where the British prosecuted Indians who had allegedly received training in the Soviet Union and were attempting to enter India through the North-West Frontier Province to spread communist propaganda. Several Indian émigrés and revolutionaries returning from Russia were arrested, interrogated, and put on trial. The prosecution highlighted the British Empire's fear of international socialist infiltration into India.

Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case (1924)

The Kanpur case was a turning point. It saw the prosecution of leading Marxist thinkers like S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad, and Shaikat Usmani. The British accused them of conspiring to overthrow the colonial government through violent revolution under the influence of the Soviet-led Comintern. Although the case ended with prison sentences, it paradoxically gave wide publicity to communist ideologies. The hearings and debates surrounding the trial were widely reported, turning the accused into public figures and sympathetic martyrs for many Indian nationalists and workers.

Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929–1933)

Perhaps the most well-known of the early conspiracy trials, the Meerut case involved

33 accused individuals, including prominent communists, trade unionists, and even some British nationals like Philip Spratt and Benjamin Bradley. The accused were charged under Section 121A of the Indian Penal Code with conspiring to deprive the King of his sovereignty in India by promoting communism and inciting class war.

The trial lasted over four years and became a major platform for articulating Marxist ideology. Far from deterring support, the trial generated significant sympathy for the accused and helped cement a foundational mythos for the CPI as a party of revolutionary intellectuals and working-class leaders committed to the anti-colonial struggle.

Impact of Conspiracy Cases

These early conspiracy trials helped radicalise a segment of Indian youth, workers, and peasants. The colonial state's heavy-handedness confirmed for many the need for systemic change, and communism provided a theoretical and organisational framework for this. Simultaneously, these cases helped bring communism into the public realm, attracting attention from both Indian nationalists and international observers.

After the lifting of the ban on the CPI in 1942, the party grew rapidly and became one of the most important forces in Indian politics, particularly in labour, student, and peasant movements. However, its early legacy remains shaped by its underground existence, international affiliations, and the state's repression through conspiracy cases.

5.4.4. Formation of CSP

The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was one of the most significant left-wing formations within the Indian nationalist movement during the pre-independence period. It emerged in response to the growing disillusionment among the younger generation of nationalists with the Gandhian

strategy of non-violence and the perceived conservatism of the Indian National Congress (INC), particularly regarding social and economic transformation. The CSP played a critical role in introducing socialist ideas into the Indian freedom struggle and influencing post-independence politics.

The CSP was formally established in 1934 in Patna, during a meeting of Congress workers who were sympathetic to socialist ideologies. Its formation was largely the result of efforts by younger Congress leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Ram Manohar Lohia, Yusuf Meherally, and others. Most of these leaders had been influenced by Marxist and socialist thought during their education in Europe and the United States, where they were exposed to global leftist movements.

The CSP emerged in the wake of serious debates within the Congress about its direction following the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34) and the growing influence of Marxism and Soviet socialism globally. These leaders believed that mere political independence was insufficient unless accompanied by socialist reconstruction, including the abolition of landlordism, industrial and agrarian reform, and the establishment of a classless society.

5.4.4.1. Ideology and Programmes

The CSP did not identify itself strictly with communism or the Soviet model but sought a democratic and Indianised form of socialism. Its members remained within the Congress but functioned as a distinct group aiming to influence Congress policy. The CSP sought:

- ◆ Abolition of *zamindari* (landlordism) and redistribution of land to the tillers.

- ◆ Workers' control over industry and the nationalisation of key sectors.
- ◆ Promotion of cooperatives, decentralisation, and grassroots democracy.
- ◆ Social justice and the eradication of caste-based inequality.

In its 1936 manifesto, the CSP emphasised class struggle and presented a vision of an independent India based on socialist principles. It positioned itself as a bridge between the mainstream nationalist movement and the working classes, whom it sought to politically mobilise through trade unions and peasant organisations.

5.4.5. Trade Union Movements

The roots of the Indian trade union movement lie in the conditions faced by Indian workers under colonial capitalism. Factories, railways, and plantations became prominent sites of labour exploitation, characterised by long working hours, low wages, poor working conditions, and a lack of legal protection. Indian workers, many of whom had migrated from rural areas, were subjected to arbitrary treatment by British managers and lacked mechanisms for collective bargaining.

One of the earliest organised protests by Indian workers occurred in the 1870s. In 1875, the first significant factory strike took place in Bombay (Mumbai) when textile mill workers protested against wage cuts. However, these early protests were spontaneous and lacked institutional backing or leadership. The absence of legal recognition for workers' rights further hampered sustained organisation.

The movement gained momentum in the early 20th century, especially during and after the First World War (1914–1918), when



inflation, food shortages, and increased costs of living exacerbated the plight of industrial workers. The Russian Revolution of 1917 also had a profound ideological influence, inspiring workers and intellectuals to think in terms of class solidarity and socialist alternatives.

5.4.5.1. The Madras Labour Union (1918)

The Madras Labour Union (MLU), established in 1918, is widely regarded as the first organised trade union in India, marking a significant milestone in the history of the Indian labour movement. Its formation occurred during a period of profound socio-economic and political transformation, both in colonial India and globally. The origins of the Madras Labour Union are intricately linked to the growth of industrialisation in Madras (now Chennai), the expansion of factory systems, and the increasing awareness among Indian workers about their rights and conditions.

By the early 20th century, Madras had developed into a major industrial centre under British colonial rule. Textile mills, railways, ports, and other industries had attracted thousands of labourers, many of whom lived and worked in appalling conditions. Workers faced long hours, low wages, lack of job security, and minimal health and safety standards. The absence of any formal mechanism to negotiate labour grievances led to widespread dissatisfaction and occasional unrest.

The immediate context for the formation of the Madras Labour Union was the wave of labour militancy that swept across various parts of the world during and after World War I. The war had disrupted economies, raised prices, and worsened living conditions for the working class. In India, the war also intensified the exploitation of workers, as industries geared up for war production demanded higher output without

corresponding improvements in wages or conditions.

Against this backdrop, a small group of progressive intellectuals and trade unionists in Madras took the initiative to organise workers formally. The union was founded in April 1918 by B.P. Wadia, a member of the Theosophical Society and a committed social reformer, alongside V. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar, a prominent labour leader. Wadia was influenced by socialist and Gandhian principles, believing that workers should be empowered to assert their rights through collective organisation. Mudaliar, a former mill worker, had firsthand experience of the workers' struggles and was instrumental in mobilising his fellow labourers.

The MLU began primarily among the workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, one of the largest textile mills in Madras. The union's early demands focused on fundamental issues such as wage increases, reasonable working hours, and better working conditions. Unlike the nascent trade unions in Britain and Europe, which had a longer history of organised labour, Indian workers had limited exposure to collective bargaining or labour legislation. Thus, the MLU's formation was a pioneering step that laid the foundation for the Indian labour movement.

In its early years, the Madras Labour Union adopted a non-violent, negotiation-oriented approach. Its leaders sought to engage both mill owners and colonial authorities through dialogue and appeals, rather than confrontational strikes. This strategy reflected the influence of contemporary political currents in India, notably Gandhian non-violent methods and the emerging nationalist movement's focus on reform rather than revolution.

The significance of the Madras Labour Union lies not merely in its status as the first trade union in India but also in its role as a catalyst for the broader labour movement.

The MLU inspired the formation of similar unions across other industrial centres in India, such as Bombay (Mumbai), Calcutta (Kolkata), and Ahmedabad. It helped shift labour issues from being treated as isolated grievances to becoming part of the political discourse of the freedom struggle.

5.4.5.2. Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (1920)

The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (ATLA), popularly known as the Majoor Mahajan Sangh, is one of the oldest and most influential trade unions in India, symbolising the organised struggle of industrial workers in the textile sector during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Founded in 1920 in Ahmedabad, a city that was rapidly emerging as the industrial hub of western India, ATLA played a crucial role in shaping the Indian labour movement and contributed significantly to the socio-political fabric of modern India.

Understanding the backdrop of the formation of the ATLA is essential to appreciate its profound impact. In the early twentieth century, Ahmedabad's textile mills were flourishing, making the city a prominent centre for cotton and textile production. However, the working conditions for the labourers were abysmal. The textile workers, largely from rural backgrounds, endured long working hours, low wages, lack of job security, and deplorable health and safety standards. These conditions were exacerbated by the exploitative policies of mill owners, who were often indifferent to workers' grievances, and the colonial government's reluctance to intervene in industrial disputes.

The ATLA was established under the leadership of Ahmedabad's industrialist and philanthropist Vallabhbhai Patel, who is widely regarded as the 'Iron Man of India.' Patel's involvement with the labour association marked a unique convergence of

industrial leadership and worker welfare. Unlike many contemporaneous industrialists, Patel believed in fostering harmonious relations between labour and management. He viewed the labour question not merely as an economic problem but as a social issue that needed a systematic and humane approach.

Under Patel's leadership, the ATLA began to organise textile workers, encouraging collective bargaining and promoting workers' rights through peaceful negotiations rather than confrontational strikes. This approach was groundbreaking at a time when labour movements globally were often marred by violent conflicts. The association's charter emphasised improving wages, securing fair working hours, establishing proper welfare measures, and enhancing workplace conditions.

5.4.5.3. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) (1920)

The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), formed in 1920, marks a seminal event in the history of India's labour movement. It was the first national-level trade union organisation in the country, emerging at a critical juncture when India's industrial working class was growing, and nationalist sentiment was gaining momentum. The formation of AITUC was not only a response to the economic exploitation of workers but was also deeply tied to the larger anti-colonial struggle against British rule.

The AITUC was founded in Bombay on October 31, 1920, at a national convention of trade unionists, socialists, and nationalists. The convention was attended by more than 100 delegates representing over 60 labour unions from different parts of the country. The key initiators included prominent nationalist and labour leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Joseph Baptista, N.M. Joshi, and Dewan Chaman Lall. Lala Lajpat Rai was elected as its first president. The decision to form



the AITUC was driven by the urgent need to coordinate and give direction to the fragmented labour movements that had begun to emerge in India in the early 20th century.

Several factors contributed to the timing and necessity of forming a unified trade union body. Post-World War I conditions led to economic hardship, including inflation, food shortages, and deteriorating living conditions for workers. These issues prompted frequent strikes and protests by workers in various industrial centres like Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. The absence of a national platform to articulate and defend workers' interests had rendered such movements local and often ineffective. Furthermore, growing awareness about workers' rights, partly influenced by international socialist movements and the Russian Revolution of 1917, created a new political consciousness among Indian labour leaders.

The AITUC was formed with the dual objectives of improving workers' conditions and aligning the labour movement with the national freedom struggle. Its constitution committed it to securing fair wages, reasonable hours of work, better working conditions, and the right to unionise. In its early years, the AITUC worked in close cooperation with the Indian National Congress, viewing the labour movement as integral to the broader nationalist movement. It also engaged with international labour bodies like the International Labour Organisation (ILO), becoming a founding member and thus representing Indian workers at the global level.

5.4.6. The Kisan Sabha Movement

The Kisan Sabha Movement was one of the most significant agrarian movements in modern Indian history. It represented the organised assertion of the peasantry against the colonial state and feudal landlords,

playing a pivotal role in shaping both nationalist politics and class consciousness in rural India. The roots of the movement can be traced back to the late 19th century, but it gained structured momentum in the early 20th century, particularly with the establishment of the All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in 1936.

The background to the movement lay in the exploitative agrarian structure imposed under British colonial rule. The Permanent Settlement in Bengal, the *Ryotwari* system in the south, and the *Mahalwari* system in the north fundamentally empowered landlords and intermediaries while leaving cultivators vulnerable to oppressive rents, usury, and land alienation. Additionally, recurring famines, fluctuating prices for agricultural produce, and a lack of institutional support heightened rural distress. These conditions created fertile ground for mass agrarian mobilisation.

The first organised expression of the movement appeared in the form of provincial kisan sabhas, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the 1920s. In UP, the Awadh Kisan Sabha, founded in 1920, became a rallying point for peasants suffering under *talukdari* oppression. It was inspired in part by nationalist ideas promoted by the Indian National Congress, but it soon acquired a radical edge, especially as local leaders such as Baba Ram Chandra mobilised peasants across caste lines and campaigned for tenancy rights, reduced rents, and protection from eviction.

In Bihar, the movement gained momentum through the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, spearheaded by leaders like Sahajanand Saraswati, who later became a founding figure in the All-India Kisan Sabha. A unique feature of the movement in Bihar was its strong socialist and Marxist influence, which emerged through the engagement of leftist leaders with peasant issues. The AIKS was formally established at the Lucknow session

of the Indian National Congress in 1936, bringing together a wide range of provincial kisan organisations under a common platform.

The AIKS advocated a wide range of agrarian demands, including the abolition of the zamindari system, reduction of rent and revenue, protection of tenant rights, and redistribution of land. The organisation was initially associated with the

Congress Socialist Party and later with the Communist Party of India (CPI), which played an increasingly important role in shaping its ideological orientation. During the late 1930s and 1940s, the Kisan Sabha movement spread to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Kerala, and Bengal. In many of these regions, local struggles occurred against landlordism and colonial repression.

Recap

- ◆ Socialist ideas gained momentum during the 1930s depression.
- ◆ Soviet economic success contrasted with global capitalist collapse.
- ◆ Indian peasants demanded reforms during economic hardship.
- ◆ Nehru and Bose symbolised the left-wing rise in Congress.
- ◆ Congress increasingly engaged with international anti-imperialist struggles.
- ◆ CPI formed in 1925, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution.
- ◆ Early communists connected with international Marxist networks.
- ◆ CPI was initially banned and functioned through front organisations.
- ◆ Conspiracy cases aimed to suppress communist influence.
- ◆ The Kanpur case publicised communist ideology across India.
- ◆ Meerut trial strengthened communist support among workers.
- ◆ CSP formed to promote democratic Indian socialism.
- ◆ CSP influenced Congress with class-based socialist ideas.
- ◆ AITUC emerged as the first national labour union.
- ◆ Kisan Sabha mobilised peasants against colonial exploitation.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Communist Party of India founded?
2. Which economic event in 1929 boosted socialist ideas globally?
3. Who was elected Congress President in 1936 and 1937?
4. Name the country that implemented successful Five-Year Plans.
5. What is the full form of CSP?
6. Which leader represented Congress at the Brussels Congress in 1927?
7. Name the first organised trade union in India.
8. In which year was the AITUC established?
9. Which city was the hub of textile labour in western India?
10. What was the original name of the ATLA?
11. In which year was the All-India Kisan Sabha formed?

Answers

1. 1925
2. Depression
3. Nehru
4. USSR
5. Congress Socialist Party
6. Nehru
7. MLU(Madras Lbour Union)
8. 1920
9. Ahmedabad
10. Majoor Mahajan Sangh
11. 1936

Assignments

1. Explain the role of the Communist Party of India in shaping early left-wing politics and class-based activism.
2. Evaluate the significance of the Kanpur, Meerut, and Peshawar Conspiracy Cases in popularising Marxist ideology in India.
3. Examine the formation, ideology, and role of the Congress Socialist Party within the Indian freedom movement.
4. Trace the origins and contributions of early trade unions like the Madras Labour Union, AITUC, and Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association to the Indian labour movement.

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UNIT

Quit India Movement - Indian National Army

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the historical context and political conditions that led to the launch of the Quit India Movement in 1942
- ◆ examine the ideology, leadership, and mass character of the Quit India Movement, with particular emphasis on its spontaneous and decentralised nature
- ◆ analyse the emergence, objectives, and organisational structure of the Indian National Army (INA) under Subhas Chandra Bose
- ◆ evaluate the role of the INA in challenging British authority and reshaping nationalist imagination through armed resistance
- ◆ assess the impact of the Quit India Movement and the INA on the final phase of India's freedom struggle and the weakening of colonial rule

Prerequisite

To meaningfully engage with the study of the Quit India Movement and the Indian National Army, learners should possess a clear understanding of the nature of British colonial rule in India and its political, economic, and social consequences. Familiarity with the growth of Indian nationalism, the evolution of the Indian National Congress, and earlier mass movements such as Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience is essential. Learners should also understand the impact of the Second World War on India, particularly how wartime pressures weakened British authority and created new political possibilities. An awareness of ideological debates within the freedom struggle, especially between Gandhian non-violent resistance and revolutionary or armed approaches, will aid in critically analysing the significance of both the Quit India Movement and the Indian National Army.

Keywords

British Colonial Rule, Indian Nationalism, Quit India Movement, Second World War, Armed Resistance, Cripps Mission

Discussion

5.5.1. The Second World War and Cripps Mission

Two major changes in world politics occurred during 1941. Having occupied Poland, Belgium, Holland, Norway, and France in the west, as well as most of Eastern Europe, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. On 7 December, Japan launched a surprise attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbour and joined the war on the side of Germany and Italy. It quickly overran the Philippines, Indochina, Indonesia, Malaya, and Burma, occupying Rangoon in March 1942. This brought the war to India's doorstep. The British Government now desperately wanted the active cooperation of Indians in the war effort. To secure this cooperation, it sent to India in March 1942 a mission headed by a Cabinet Minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, who had earlier been a radical member of the Labour Party and a strong supporter of the Indian national movement.

Even though Cripps declared that the aim of British policy in India was “the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India,” detailed negotiations between him and the Congress leaders broke down. The British Government refused to accept the Congress demand for the immediate transfer of effective power to Indians. On the other hand, the Indian leaders could not be satisfied by mere promises for the future while the Viceroy retained his autocratic powers in the present. They were anxious to cooperate in the war effort, especially as the Japanese army endangered Indian

territory. However, they felt they could do so only when a national government was formed in the country.

The failure of the Cripps Mission embittered the people of India. While they still fully sympathised with the anti-Fascist forces, they felt that the existing political situation in the country had become intolerable. The Congress now decided to take active steps to compel the British to accept the Indian demand for independence. The All India Congress Committee met in Bombay on 8 August 1942. It passed the famous ‘Quit India’ Resolution and proposed the commencement of a non-violent mass struggle under Gandhi's leadership to achieve this aim. The resolution declared:

5.5.2. Quit India Movement

Before the Congress could start a movement, the Government struck hard. Early in the morning of 9 August, Gandhi and other Congress leaders were arrested, and the Congress was once again declared illegal. The news of these arrests left the country aghast, and a spontaneous movement of protest arose everywhere, giving expression to the pent-up anger of the people. Left leaderless and without any organisation, the people reacted in any manner they could. All over the country, there were hartals, strikes in factories, schools and colleges, and demonstrations that were met with lathi-charges and gunfire. Angered by repeated firings and repression, in many places, the people resorted to violent actions. They attacked the symbols of British authority—police



stations, post offices, railway stations, etc.

They cut telegraph and telephone wires, disrupted railway lines, and burned government buildings. Madras and Bengal were the most affected in this respect. In many places, the rebels seized temporary control over towns, cities, and villages. British authority disappeared in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra. In some areas, the revolutionaries set up 'parallel governments'. In general, the students, workers, and peasants provided the backbone of the revolt, while the upper classes and the bureaucracy remained loyal to the Government. The Government, for its part, went all out to crush the 1942 movement. Its repression knew no bounds, and the press was completely muzzled.

Prisoners were tortured. The police and secret police reigned supreme, and the military took over many towns and cities. Over 10,000 people died in police and military firings. Rebellious villages had to pay huge sums as punitive fines, and the villagers had to undergo mass floggings. India had not witnessed such intense repression since the Revolt of 1857. In the end, the Government succeeded in crushing the movement. The Revolt of 1942, as it has been termed, was, in fact, short-lived. Its importance lay in the fact that it demonstrated the depth to which nationalist feeling had reached in the country and the great capacity for struggle and sacrifice that the people had developed. After the suspension of the Revolt of 1942, there was hardly any political activity inside the country until the war ended in 1945. The established leaders of the national movement were behind bars, and no new leaders arose to take their place or to give new direction to the country. In 1943, Bengal was plunged into the worst famine in recent history. Within a few months, over three million people died of starvation. There was deep anger

among the people, for the Government could have prevented the famine from taking such a heavy toll on life. This anger, however, found little political expression.

5.5.2.1. Spread of the Movement

In many parts of India, people resorted to attacking symbols of British authority—such as post offices, railway stations, and police stations. In places like Ballia (Uttar Pradesh), Tamluk (Bengal), and Satara (Maharashtra), people set up parallel governments, also known as *Jatiya Sarkars*, which functioned for brief periods and challenged British administrative authority.

The movement saw active participation from students, women, workers, peasants, and underground socialist and communist networks. In the absence of senior Congress leaders, younger leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia, Aruna Asaf Ali, Jayaprakash Narayan, and Usha Mehta (who ran a secret radio) played crucial roles in sustaining the movement through underground publications, sabotage activities, and organising protests.

In regions such as Bihar, the movement took a militant turn, especially in Patna, Gaya, and Champaran, where police stations were attacked and railway lines were disrupted. In Eastern Uttar Pradesh, students and local activists disrupted communication lines and engaged in guerrilla tactics. In Maharashtra, the movement was particularly strong in Satara, where people set up the most organised and long-lasting parallel government.

In Bengal, particularly Midnapore, the movement was deeply rooted in the earlier tradition of revolutionary nationalism. Local leaders organised resistance against British rule, and the area saw one of the strongest and most determined local movements.

5.5.2.3. British Repression and Response

The government, for its part, went all out to crush the 1942 movement. Its repression knew no bounds. The press was completely muzzled, prisoners were tortured, and the police and secret police reigned supreme. The military took over many towns and cities. Over 10,000 people died in police and military firings. Rebel villages had to pay huge sums as punitive fines, and the villagers faced mass floggings. India had not witnessed such intense repression since the Revolt of 1857.

After the suppression of the movement of 1942, there was hardly any political activity inside the country until the war ended in 1945. The established leaders of the national movement were in jail, and new leaders emerged to take their place or to provide a new direction for the country. In 1943, Bengal was plunged into the worst famine in recent history. Within a few months, over three million people died of starvation. There was deep anger among the people that the government could have prevented the famine from taking such a heavy toll on life. This anger, however, found little political expression.

The national movement, however, found a new expression outside the country's frontiers. Subhas Chandra Bose had escaped from India in March 1941 to seek help from the Soviet Union. But when the Soviet Union joined the Allies in June 1941, he went to Germany. In February 1943, he left for Japan to organise an armed struggle against British rule with Japanese assistance. In Singapore, he formed the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army or INA for short) to conduct military campaigns for the liberation of India. He was assisted by Rash Behari Bose, an old revolutionary.

5.5.4. Indian National Army (INA)

Before the arrival of Subhas Bose, steps towards the organisation of the INA had been taken by General Mohan Singh (who had been a Captain in the British-Indian army). The INA was joined in large numbers by Indian residents in Southeast Asia and by Indian soldiers and officers captured by the Japanese forces in Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. Subhas Bose, who was now called 'Netaji' by the soldiers of the INA, gave his followers the battle cry of 'Jai Hind'. The INA joined the Japanese army in its march on India from Burma. Inspired by the aim of freeing their homeland, the soldiers and officers of the INA hoped to enter India as its liberators, with Subhas Bose at the head of the Provisional Government of Free India.

With the collapse of Japan in the war during 1944–45, the INA too met defeat, and Subhas Bose was killed in an aeroplane accident on his way to Tokyo. Even though his strategy of winning freedom in cooperation with the fascist powers was criticised at the time by most Indian nationalists, by organising the INA he set an inspiring example of patriotism before the Indian people and the Indian army. He was hailed as Netaji by the entire country.

With the end of the War in Europe in April 1945, India's struggle for freedom entered a new phase. The movement of 1942 and the INA had revealed the heroism and determination of the Indian people. With the release of the national leaders from jail, the people began to look forward to another, perhaps the final, struggle for freedom.

This new struggle took the form of a massive movement against the trial of the soldiers and officers of the INA. The government decided to put on trial in the Red Fort in Delhi Shah Nawaz Khan, Gurdial



Singh Dhillon, and Prem Sehgal, officers of the INA who had previously been officers in the British-Indian army. They were accused of having broken the oath of loyalty to the British Crown and thus of having become 'traitors'. On the other hand, the people welcomed them as national heroes. Huge popular demonstrations demanding their release were held all over the country. The entire nation now seethed with excitement and confidence that this time the struggle would be won. They would not let these heroes be punished. Furthermore, the British government was, this time, in no position to ignore Indian opinion. Even though the Court Martial found the INA prisoners guilty, the government felt it expedient to set them free.

The changed attitude of the British government can be explained by several factors.

Firstly, the war changed the balance of power in the world. Not Britain, but the United States of America and the Soviet Union emerged from the war as the major powers. Both supported India's demand for freedom.

Secondly, even though Britain was on the winning side in the war, its economic

and military power was shattered. The Conservatives were replaced by the Labour Party, many of whose members supported the Congress demand.

Thirdly, the British Indian Government could no longer rely on the Indian personnel of its civil administration and armed forces to suppress the national movement. The INA had shown that patriotic ideas had entered the ranks of the professional Indian army, the chief instrument of British rule in India. Another straw in the wind was the famous revolt of the Indian naval ratings at Bombay in February 1946. The ratings had fought a seven-hour battle with the army and navy and had surrendered only when asked to do so by the national leaders. Moreover, there were also widespread strikes in the Indian Air Force. The Indian Signal Corps at Jabalpur also went on strike. The other two major instruments of British rule, the police and the bureaucracy, were also showing signs of nationalist leanings. Fourthly, and above all, the confident and determined mood of the Indian people was by now obvious. They would no longer tolerate the humiliation of foreign rule.

Recap

- ◆ Cripps Mission failed to meet Congress demands.
- ◆ British refused immediate transfer of power.
- ◆ Congress passed Quit India resolution, August 1942.
- ◆ Government arrested Gandhi and Congress leaders immediately.
- ◆ People launched spontaneous protests and demonstrations nationwide.
- ◆ Protesters targeted symbols of British colonial rule.
- ◆ Parallel governments formed in Ballia, Tamluk, and Satara.

- ◆ Youth, students, and women sustained underground resistance efforts.
- ◆ British repression included bombings, torture, and mass killings.
- ◆ The revolt of 1942 exposed deep nationalist sentiment.
- ◆ The INA, led by Netaji, inspired nationalist unity.
- ◆ INA trials sparked massive public protests in India.
- ◆ Post-war Britain was weakened politically, economically, and militarily.
- ◆ Indian armed forces showed growing nationalist sympathies.

Objective Questions

1. What was the main demand of the Congress during the Cripps Mission?
2. On which date was the Quit India Resolution passed?
3. Who led the proposed mass struggle under the Quit India Movement?
4. What action did the British government take on 9 August 1942?
5. Which social groups mainly formed the backbone of the Quit India Movement?
6. Name one region where a parallel government was established.
7. Who was the woman leader associated with running a secret radio?
8. What type of repression did the British use against protesters?
9. Who originally began organising the INA before Subhas Chandra Bose?
10. What was the battle cry given by Subhas Chandra Bose?
11. Where were the INA officers put on trial?
12. Which event in 1946 indicated nationalist feelings in the navy?

Answers

1. Immediate transfer of effective power to Indians
2. 8 August 1942
3. Mahatma Gandhi
4. Arrested Gandhi and other Congress leaders
5. Students, workers, and peasants
6. Satara (Maharashtra)
7. Usha Mehta
8. Firings, torture, bombings, and mass floggings
9. General Mohan Singh
10. Jai Hind
11. Red Fort, Delhi
12. Naval ratings revolt in Bombay

Assignments

1. Discuss the objectives and failure of the Cripps Mission. What were its implications for the Indian freedom movement?
2. Analyse the causes, course, and consequences of the Quit India Movement of 1942. How did the British respond to the movement?
3. Explain the role of underground leaders and parallel governments in sustaining the Quit India Movement. Provide regional examples.
4. Evaluate the contributions of Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army (INA) to India's struggle for independence.
5. How did the post-World War II global and domestic conditions influence British decisions regarding India's independence?
6. Write an essay on Gandhi's slogan 'Do or Die'.

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BLOCK

Partition and Freedom



UNIT

Negotiations for Independence

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain how World War II altered British policy and accelerated the transfer of power
- ◆ analyse major constitutional proposals, their aims, negotiations, and failures
- ◆ assess the roles of Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah in the constitutional negotiations and their impact
- ◆ explain the causes, course, and consequences of communal violence
- ◆ evaluate the Mountbatten Plan, the 1947 transfer of power, and how partition became tied to independence

Prerequisite

By the mid-1940s, the Indian National movement had entered a decisive phase. The Second World War altered global politics and hastened the decline of the British Empire. Within India, political rivalry between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League intensified, especially over the question of representation and constitutional framework. Between 1945 and 1947, a series of negotiations were attempted to determine the structure of independent India. These negotiations, involving the Simla Conference, the 1945–46 elections, the Cabinet Mission, the Interim Government, and the final Mountbatten Plan, ultimately paved the way for the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. This unit examines these developments, showing how constitutional breakdown, communal tensions, and political pressures shaped India's road to freedom.



Keywords

Wavell Plan, Simla Conference, Cabinet Mission, Interim Government, Direct Action Day, Partition, Mountbatten Plan, Pakistan demand, Communal politics, Transfer of power

Discussion

6.1.1. Impact of World War II on British Policy

As India entered the final phase of the freedom struggle, the political climate was marked by uncertainty, tension, and the urgent need for a constitutional settlement. By 1945, it had become clear to both British and Indian leaders that the existing colonial structure could no longer function effectively. The Second World War had weakened Britain's economic and military capacity, while Indian political forces, especially the Congress and the Muslim League, had become stronger and more assertive. The colonial state had relied heavily on the Indian army, bureaucracy, and loyalists to maintain control, but these pillars had eroded during the war. Indian soldiers now outnumbered British troops, and the morale among British officials had dropped due to long wartime service and growing nationalist protests.

It was not feasible for Britain to maintain a vast colonial empire. Meanwhile, the ideological justification for colonial rule had lost credibility both in India and beyond. Nationalist resistance, especially the Quit India movement of 1942, had further undermined British control. Thus, Britain entered the post-war period with a clear awareness that its power in India could not be restored to pre-war levels. Discussions over India's future constitution therefore became the central arena where independence, representation, and the question of national unity were debated. These negotiations would shape not only the transfer of power but also the tragic path towards Partition.

The war also altered the international environment. Anti-colonial sentiment grew worldwide, and organisations like the United Nations opposed imperialism. The British Labour Government under Clement Attlee, elected in 1945, adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards India's demands. Attlee and his colleagues recognised that ruling India through repression was neither practical nor politically acceptable. Thus, Britain began planning a "graceful withdrawal", a process that required negotiations with Indian leaders, clarity on constitutional arrangements, and, eventually, a decision about unity versus partition. This shift set the stage for the next major attempt at compromise, which was the Cripps Mission.

6.1.2 Cripps Mission

Before the final phase of negotiations began in 1945, India witnessed the Cripps Mission in 1942. It was a critical turning point that influenced later developments. Sir Stafford Cripps arrived in India with the aim of winning Indian cooperation in the war effort. His proposals included granting Dominion Status after the war, setting up a Constituent Assembly, and allowing provinces the option to remain outside the Union. It was an early hint at possible division.

However, the Mission failed because neither major political party accepted its terms. Congress rejected the idea of provinces opting out, as it threatened national unity. The Muslim League, on the other hand, felt that the proposal did not adequately

recognise the demand for Pakistan. Even British officials were unwilling to hand over real power during wartime. The failure of the Cripps Mission widened the rift between Congress and the League and made it clear that any future negotiations would have to address the communal question directly. This became evident in the next major event, the Shimla Conference of 1945.

Gandhi consistently opposed partition and believed that Hindus and Muslims could live together in a united, non-violent India. His interventions during communal riots, especially in Noakhali and Bihar, reflected his commitment to peace and unity. Meanwhile, Jawaharlal Nehru, representing a younger leadership within Congress, adopted a more modern, centralised vision of India. As head of the Interim Government, he insisted on a strong Union with limited provincial autonomy, believing that excessive decentralisation could fragment the country. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, became the chief spokesperson for Muslim political identity. He argued that Muslims were a separate nation and could not be subordinated to a Hindu-majority Congress. His insistence that the League was the sole representative of Muslims shaped every negotiation and ultimately led to the demand for Pakistan. With these contrasting positions, the first major post-war negotiation, the Shimla Conference, took place.

6.1.3 Political Developments After World War II: The Simla Conference (1945)

Wavell Plan and the Simla Conference, 1945

After World War II ended in 1945, India entered a period of intense political activity as the British tried to devise a plan

for transferring power. One of the earliest efforts was the Simla Conference, held in June-July 1945, called by Viceroy Lord Wavell at the Viceregal Lodge. Wavell invited Congress and Muslim League leaders to the Conference, with the purpose of finding a workable political arrangement before fresh elections were held. The Wavell Plan proposed reconstituting the Executive Council with equal representation for caste Hindus and Muslims, hoping to balance both communities.

The British hoped the conference would produce an agreement between Congress and the Muslim League, allowing a new Executive Council to be formed, coalition ministries to operate smoothly in the provinces, and India to move towards elections for a future Constituent Assembly. Congress leaders, including Gandhi and Maulana Azad, attended the meeting. Although Gandhi held no official post, he played an important advisory role.

The central disagreement at Simla was Jinnah's demand that the Muslim League be recognised as the sole representative of Muslims, a claim that Congress firmly rejected because it believed it represented all Indians, regardless of religion. The British also faced pressure from the Unionist Party in Punjab, which represented both Muslims and Hindus and opposed Jinnah's exclusive claim. In the end, the British chose to support Jinnah and the League, partly because of their wartime cooperation. The conference failed, and no agreement was reached, but Congress continued its resistance to both British authority and the League's position. The failure of Simla pushed India towards electoral politics, which would dramatically change the political balance between Congress and the League.



6.1.4 Elections of 1945-46 and Their Aftermath

Following the failure of the Simla Conference, political momentum revived with the Labour Party's rise to power in Britain, which soon announced elections to the central and provincial assemblies for late 1945 and early 1946. These elections were crucial as they would determine the composition of the future Constituent Assembly. The Congress campaign centred on anti-British issues such as the release of INA prisoners, punishment for officials responsible for the repression of 1942, and the broader demand for independence, although it underestimated the electoral significance of the demand for Pakistan.

The Muslim League, despite organisational weaknesses, conducted an energetic campaign focused on projecting itself as the sole representative of Indian Muslims and gained substantial support from religious leaders, local elites, and patronage networks, especially in Punjab and Bengal. Congress also faced difficulties in fielding strong Muslim candidates and managing nationalist Muslim organisations that increasingly sided with the League.

The election results reflected sharp communal polarisation: in the Central Assembly, Congress won 57 seats and the League 30, while in the provincial assemblies Congress secured 923 of 1585 seats, and the League captured about 76% of the Muslim vote, winning majorities in Bengal, Sind, and Punjab. Congress formed ministries in Madras, Bombay, and the United Provinces, while the League established governments in Bengal and Sind; in Punjab, failed negotiations led to a coalition of the Akalis, Unionists, and Congress rather than a League-led ministry. These results confirmed Congress as the primary national party and

the League as the dominant voice of Indian Muslims, creating a dual mandate that made cooperation between the two essential for any future constitutional settlement and paving the way for the Cabinet Mission Plan.

Britain's Withdrawal from India

By the end of World War II, British power in India had weakened sharply. The traditional tools of colonial control no longer worked effectively, and the main pillars of British rule, the army and the bureaucracy, were showing signs of strain. Indian recruits now outnumbered British soldiers, and the morale of British officials had fallen due to long wartime service and increasing nationalist resistance. This decline in colonial authority was visible to both British administrators and the Indian population. At the same time, the Congress Party's strategy, described by Bipan Chandra as "struggle-truce-struggle," created major difficulties for the British. Congress would launch intense movements and then pause for negotiation, making it hard for colonial officials to maintain stable control. The brutal repression of the Quit India Movement in 1942 and the government's refusal to respond to Gandhi's hunger strike in 1943 further damaged the British image and reduced their support even among traditionally loyal groups.

By late 1945, the British government felt it had “responsibility without power.” They feared that Congress-led provincial governments might support a future revolt. Although such a revolt could likely be suppressed, the British lacked enough reliable officials to govern India effectively afterward. This shortage of capable and loyal administrative staff made the continuation of direct colonial rule increasingly unrealistic. In early 1946, Prime Minister Clement Attlee concluded that the British could no longer maintain their rule through coercion.



Several factors shaped this decision: the administration was too weak to enforce harsh measures, large segments of the armed forces were deployed elsewhere, British troops were reluctant to serve in India, and many Indian troops were unreliable for enforcing colonial control. Additionally, world opinion, especially from the United Nations, and anti-imperialist sentiment within the Labour Party made the continuation of colonial rule politically costly.

With colonial rule becoming unsustainable, the British sought a “graceful withdrawal.” Key developments soon followed. On 1 January 1946, the Secretary of State signalled Britain’s intention to leave India. On 19 February 1946, Attlee announced the Cabinet Mission, after deciding on 22 January to send it to India to create a constitutional framework for the transfer of power. Although the British considered a phased withdrawal, they abandoned the idea because they doubted whether they could maintain authority after March 1948.

The Congress Party, recognising that independence was approaching, decided to wait for concrete British proposals while remaining prepared for mass movements if negotiations failed. Gandhi argued that once Britain had openly declared its intention to quit, Indians had nothing to lose by waiting for the details of the offer. By early 1946, the British also shifted their policy towards keeping India united at the moment of departure. This change was driven by the belief that a united India would provide a more stable transition and serve long-term British strategic interests. Although some officials continued to prefer Jinnah and the Muslim League, most agreed that working with Congress and maintaining Indian unity was the best path forward.

6.1.5 Cabinet Mission Plan

The Cabinet Mission arrived in India in early 1946 with a clear mandate from the British government to avoid partition and ensure a peaceful transfer of power. Its Plan, announced in May-June 1946, proposed a federal structure with a weak centre controlling defence, foreign affairs, and communications, and three groups of provinces, each of which could reconsider its membership after elections, thereby granting significant provincial autonomy. While the British still hoped for a united India, the Plan immediately generated conflicting interpretations:

Congress viewed it as allowing provinces the freedom to opt out of grouping, which would weaken Muslim-majority blocs and help preserve a stronger central government, whereas the Muslim League regarded the grouping arrangement as a step toward Pakistan because it gave Muslim-majority provinces collective power and the possibility of questioning the constitutional order later. The Cabinet Mission attempted to satisfy both sides, but these contradictory assurances eventually caused the Plan’s collapse. As British authority weakened and the formation of a popular government became unavoidable, Congress insisted on its right to form the Constituent Assembly independently. This triggered the League’s withdrawal of support, marking the collapse of the Plan and setting the stage for a political crisis that culminated in the League’s call for Direct Action Day.

6.1.6 Direct Action Day and Its Consequences

The Muslim League declared 16 August 1946 as Direct Action Day to demonstrate its commitment to Pakistan. The day led to horrific communal riots in Calcutta under the League-led provincial government.



Thousands were killed, and the violence shocked the entire country. Gandhi, Patel, and Nehru recognised that the situation was spiralling toward civil war.

The violence soon spread to Noakhali and Tippera in East Bengal, where killings, forced conversions, and abductions took place. Local officials often behaved indifferently or even with communal bias. Gandhi personally went to Noakhali to work for peace, walking from village to village. Despite his efforts, the deep communal distrust made reconciliation difficult. Retaliatory violence erupted in Bihar, prompting Gandhi to intervene again and call for repentance and the restoration of Muslim homes.

These events convinced many leaders that the unity of India was becoming increasingly difficult to preserve. As communal tensions rose, the formation of the Interim Government added another layer of conflict.

6.1.7 Interim Government and the Deadlock with the Muslim League

On 2 September 1946, the Interim Government was formed under Jawaharlal Nehru. Initially, the Muslim League refused to join, accusing Congress of trying to dominate the political process. Under pressure, the League later joined but adopted a strategy of obstruction. Its ministers criticised government decisions publicly, refused cooperation, and even encouraged civil disobedience in provinces.

This behaviour made the functioning of the Interim Government extremely difficult. The League also demanded the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, arguing that it did not represent Muslims. Congress leaders became increasingly convinced that cooperation with the League was impossible. By early 1947, the British realised that the

constitutional process could not continue in this deadlocked situation. This realisation set the stage for Mountbatten's arrival and the final decision on partition.

6.1.8 Mountbatten Plan and the Final Decision for Partition

When Lord Mountbatten arrived as Viceroy in March 1947, he quickly understood that the Cabinet Mission Plan was unworkable. The scale of communal violence and the political deadlock made partition appear to him as the only practical solution. The British also wanted a rapid exit to avoid responsibility for further unrest.

The Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947 announced the division of India into two dominions—India and Pakistan. Punjab and Bengal would be partitioned along communal lines, while Princely States would choose which dominion to join. The transfer of power, initially planned for 1948, was advanced to 15 August 1947. Congress accepted partition reluctantly, fearing that rejecting it would lead to civil war. Gandhi opposed partition but failed to persuade either Congress or the League. Jinnah insisted on Pakistan and became its first Governor-General. The boundary demarcation, carried out hurriedly by the Radcliffe Commission, led to chaos, mass migration, and widespread violence. Nevertheless, it marked the end of nearly two centuries of British rule and the beginning of two new nations.

Transfer of Power

The transfer of power on 15 August 1947 was both a moment of liberation and tragedy. While India celebrated independence, it also mourned the massive loss of life caused by partition. Gandhi continued to work tirelessly for communal harmony until his assassination in January 1948. Nehru and

Patel turned their attention to consolidating the new Indian state, integrating princely states, and framing the Constitution.

Partition was justified at the time as an act of self-determination meant to prevent further

bloodshed, though many leaders hoped the division would be temporary. Yet its consequences, mass displacement, communal bitterness, and long-lasting political tensions, shaped South Asia for decades to come.

“Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance...”

...The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but so long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over. And so we have to labour and to work, and work hard, to give reality to our dreams. Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world.”

An excerpt from Jawaharlal Nehru’s Tryst of Destiny speech, August 15, 1947

Recap

- ◆ The Second World War significantly eroded British imperial authority and hastened the decision to withdraw from India.
- ◆ Although the Cripps Mission failed to secure political consensus, it set important precedents for subsequent constitutional negotiations.
- ◆ The political strategies and ideological positions of Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah decisively shaped the trajectory of late-colonial Indian politics.
- ◆ The Simla Conference collapsed primarily due to irreconcilable differences over Muslim political representation.
- ◆ The elections of 1945–46 reaffirmed the Indian National Congress’s mass support while consolidating the Muslim League’s exclusive claim to represent Muslim constituencies.
- ◆ The Cabinet Mission Plan sought to preserve Indian unity through a loose federal framework and grouped provinces.

- ◆ Divergent interpretations of the Plan by the principal political actors ultimately undermined its implementation.
- ◆ The Muslim League's call for Direct Action Day precipitated widespread communal violence, marking a decisive rupture in constitutional politics.
- ◆ Confronted with escalating disorder and political deadlock, Mountbatten concluded that partition was unavoidable.
- ◆ Consequently, independence and partition were effected simultaneously in August 1947, reshaping the political geography of South Asia.

Objective Questions

1. Who led the Cripps Mission?
2. In which year was the Shimla Conference held?
3. Which party secured the most Muslim seats in the 1946 elections?
4. What were the three subjects reserved for the Centre in the Cabinet Mission Plan?
5. When was Direct Action Day observed?
6. Who became Vice-President of the Interim Government?
7. Which Viceroy announced the 3 June Plan?
8. When was British withdrawal finally scheduled?
9. Who became Pakistan's first Governor-General?
10. Which province witnessed Gandhi's major peace mission in 1946?

Answers

1. Sir Stafford Cripps
2. 1945
3. The Muslim League
4. Defence, foreign affairs, and communication
5. 16 August 1946
6. Jawaharlal Nehru
7. Lord Mountbatten
8. 15 August 1947
9. Muhammad Ali Jinnah
10. Noakhali (in Bengal)

Assignments

1. Critically examine the impact of World War II on Britain's decision to withdraw from India.
2. Analyse the Cabinet Mission Plan and explain why it ultimately failed.
3. Discuss the role of communal violence in shaping the decision for partition.
4. Evaluate the contributions of Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah to the constitutional negotiations between 1945 and 1947.
5. Assess the significance of the Mountbatten Plan in the final transfer of power.



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Suggested Reading

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UNIT

Partition as a Human Tragedy

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the concept of communalism and its historical evolution in colonial India
- ◆ analyse the economic, social, and political processes that produced and intensified communal tensions
- ◆ describe the institutional and constitutional developments through which religion became politicised
- ◆ evaluate the translation of communal politics into organised mass violence and its role in precipitating Partition
- ◆ assess the human consequences of Partition, with particular attention to displacement, loss, trauma, and memory

Prerequisite

The division of British India in August 1947 into two sovereign dominions, India and Pakistan, was not a single sudden decision but the culmination of decades of social change, political contestation and institutional arrangements under colonial rule. The immediate causes of the 1947 catastrophe can be traced to the final years of British withdrawal and the collapse of negotiations between political elites. However, the deeper roots lie in processes that unfolded since the late nineteenth century: uneven economic development, patterns of social mobility and exclusion, the spread of Western-style education, colonial administrative practices including separate electorates, and the emergence of political organisations that increasingly mobilised on the basis of religion. This unit approaches Partition

as a human tragedy, a political event whose meaning must be read through the lived experiences of millions, their fears, aspirations, massacres, migrations, and the long process of reconstruction that followed.

Keywords

Communalism, Partition, Rehabilitation, Nationalism, Two-Nation Theory, Separate Electorates, Refugee Camps, Direct Action, Lahore Resolution, Migration, Gendered Violence, Radcliffe Line

Discussion

6.2.1 Communalism

Before we examine the violence of 1946-48, we must define the ideology and practice called ‘communalism’ and see how it developed as a political force in modern India. Communalism in modern Indian history refers to the ‘politicisation’ of religious identity, especially the mobilising of Hindus and Muslims as collective political actors with competing secular interests. Unlike religious practice or belief, communalism is a political attitude and strategy. It asserts that people of a given religion share not only faith but a common set of economic, social, and political interests that place them in fundamental conflict with other communities. Communalism emerged alongside modern nationalism and modern class formations. It is not simply a “timeless” religious hatred but a historically situated response to colonial modernity, uneven development, and competition for scarce public resources. It is critical to treat communalism analytically, as an ideology, a set of organisational practices, and a repertoire of mobilisation that can be peaceful, such as demands for safeguards and representation, or violent, such as riots, pogroms, and ultimately the mass displacement of 1947.

Bipan Chandra conceptualises communalism as a process with three interlinked elements. First, communal thought presumes that followers of a religion share the same secular interests, that is, that religious affiliation neatly maps onto political and economic aims. Second, in a multi-religious society such as British India, those secular interests are often seen as divergent. The belief that communities have different stakes in property, jobs, language, and political power becomes widespread. Third, when these perceived divergences harden, they are interpreted as mutually incompatible, and political competition converts into antagonism. Chandra’s model is useful because it traces how ordinary grievances about employment, land, language, or representation can be refracted through religious lenses and turned into claims of existential group conflict.

The colonial transformation produced patterns of growth concentrated in the tertiary and service sectors (administration, law, trade), where sections of the Hindu population, often socially positioned for commerce and English education, gained disproportionate advantages. Sections of the Muslim elite were slower to enter Western education and modern professions.

The cumulative effect of educational and economic lag produced anxieties and a sense of relative deprivation. It is argued that the British institutionalised communal representation through separate electorates and weightage as early as the Morley-Minto reforms. This created incentives for vote-bank politics and communal bargaining. Cultural and organisational factors also mattered. Networks of religious leaders, caste elites, and landlord groups could be mobilised by political entrepreneurs. Finally, global and regional events, such as the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate, pan-Islamist currents, and the changing posture of the British state during and after the World Wars, shaped communal narratives.

6.2.1.1 The Rise of Communal Politics

The social roots of communalism can be traced in the composition and aspirations of the emerging middle classes. Under colonial rule, the most rapid growth occurred in the 'sphere of circulation', legal professions, clerical posts, and merchant activity, rather than in broad-based industrial production. Those groups that adapted quickly to English education and new commercial opportunities, often Hindu castes and communities, advanced into the bureaucracy and professions, while many Muslim elites, especially feudal landlords and traditional religious authorities, found themselves politically and economically marginalised. Communal leaders, both conservative landlords and newer middle-class actors, weaponised these anxieties, offering protection and the prospect of power through separate political mobilisation. Scholars such as A. R. Desai and R. P. Dutt interpret communalism as a by-product of class conflict and colonial underdevelopment. It was often a middle-class phenomenon in which competition for limited public resources was refracted in religious terms.

Growth of Communalism

To understand how communal politics developed in India, we need to trace the shift from cultural reform movements to fully politicised communal organisations. In the late nineteenth century, many Muslim leaders focused on social and educational reform rather than political separatism. The most important example of this phase was the Aligarh Movement. Syed Ahmad Khan encouraged Muslims to pursue modern, Western-style education and to build cooperative relations with the British. Aligarh soon became a major centre for intellectual debate and modern learning within the Muslim community. However, the mood gradually changed as concerns about political decline and marginalisation grew. By the 1880s and 1890s, many Muslim elites began to fear that a Hindu-majority nationalist movement might dominate future political institutions. These anxieties encouraged a more defensive outlook. Muslim associations formed in various provinces to promote Muslim interests, and the idea of distinct political representation began to gain ground.

This trend culminated in the founding of the All-India Muslim League in 1906. The League, established mainly by landed elites and educated professionals, represented a new stage in communal politics. Instead of focusing solely on cultural reform, it now demanded specific political safeguards, especially separate electorates and constitutional protections. These measures were seen as necessary to prevent Muslims from being overruled by a Hindu majority in representative institutions. At the same time, Hindu communal organisations were also taking shape. The Hindu Mahasabha and later the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) promoted an openly Hindu political identity. They argued that Congress-style secular nationalism did not sufficiently defend Hindu interests, particularly during periods of communal tension. These groups



contributed to the parallel development of Hindu communal politics. The colonial state played a major role in strengthening both forms of communalism. British constitutional reforms, such as granting communal representation, encouraged political competition along religious lines. By recognising communities as separate political units, the colonial government effectively legitimised community-based bargaining and reinforced the idea that Hindus and Muslims had fundamentally different political interests.

6.2.1.2 Formation of the All-India Muslim League

The rise of a pan-Indian Muslim political organisation transformed colonial politics and eventually played a crucial role in the demand for Pakistan. This organisation was the All-India Muslim League, founded in 1906. Unlike the Indian National Congress, which claimed to represent all Indians, the Muslim League was created specifically to represent Muslim political interests. Its early supporters primarily came from the Muslim landed elites, government officials, lawyers, and the educated urban middle class. The formation of the League was shaped by several factors. Many Muslim elites feared that the growing nationalist movement, led mostly by Hindu leaders, might overlook Muslim concerns. At the same time, the British government encouraged the creation of separate Muslim political representation because it helped them balance and weaken Congress's influence. There was also a rising sense of communal identity among Muslims, influenced by social reform movements and educational organisations such as the Aligarh movement. All these developments created a demand for a political body that could advocate for Muslim interests.

In its early years, the Muslim League did not ask for a separate nation. Instead,

it focused on protecting what it saw as Muslim “secular” interests. These included fair representation in government services, special safeguards in legislatures, and separate electorates in which Muslims would vote only for Muslim candidates. The Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 accepted separate electorates, giving official recognition to the idea that political representation could be organised along communal lines. This strengthened communal politics in India. Over time, the League's character changed. What began as a small elite organisation gradually expanded into a mass party, especially under Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership in the 1930s and 1940s. Jinnah reorganised the League, broadened its social base, and turned it into a powerful political force. By the 1940s, the League's language shifted from seeking safeguards within India to demanding a separate Muslim homeland. This transformation eventually led to the demand for Pakistan and shaped the final phase of India's freedom struggle.

6.2.1.3 ‘Hindu’ Communalism

‘Hindu’ communalism also changed and expanded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was not simply a reaction to Muslim communalism, nor was it a marginal force. Several organisations and intellectual currents began to promote a distinct Hindu political identity. The Hindu Mahasabha, which started as a cultural body, gradually transformed into a political organisation for those who believed that the Indian National Congress did not adequately defend Hindu interests. These leaders felt that Congress's commitment to secular nationalism sometimes ignored issues they considered vital to Hindu society. Important ideological shifts also shaped Hindu communal politics. V. D. Savarkar developed the idea of *Hindutva*, which presented India as primarily a Hindu nation and defined national belonging in narrowly

cultural and religious terms. Alongside this, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) emerged as a volunteer-based organisation that promoted a strong Hindu identity. It trained dedicated cadres and spread an assertive, sometimes militant, form of Hindu nationalism. However, Hindu communalism was not uniform across India. In many regions, it remained weak or marginal, and many Hindus continued to support inclusive, secular nationalism. Yet by the interwar years (1919-39), Hindu communal organisations had grown enough to form a visible counter-public to the Muslim League. Their presence complicated Congress's efforts to build a broad, united nationalist movement that transcended religious boundaries.

Hindu communalism often responded to Muslim political mobilisation, such as demands for separate electorates or the growing strength of the Muslim League. However, it was also proactive, aiming to secure cultural dominance and redefine India's political identity in explicitly Hindu terms. This contributed to rising mistrust and hardened communal boundaries during the 1930s and 1940s. With the long-term roots of communal tension established, we can now turn to the most dramatic and painful outcome of Partition, which led to the massive population movements of 1947. These migrations reshaped the social atmosphere of India and Pakistan and became one of the largest and most traumatic human displacements in world history.

6.2.2 From Communalism to Partition

In the years before World War I and immediately afterwards, Muslim political consciousness grew rapidly. Leaders like Dr. Ansari, Abul Kalam Azad, and Hakim Ajmal Khan, influenced by the Aligarh movement, argued that Muslims should participate in the wider national movement rather than remain politically

subservient. At the Lucknow session of the Muslim League in 1913 and the subsequent Lucknow Pact of 1916, Congress and the League reached a temporary compromise: the League accepted broader cooperation while Congress conceded separate electorates and reserved seats for minorities. Although the Pact created political unity for a moment, it also entrenched communal representation as the normal political practice, encouraging future communal bargaining rather than a single secular politics.

Hindu-Muslim unity reached its high point during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movement (1919-22), when Gandhi and Congress allied with Muslim leaders over the Khilafat cause. This cooperation mobilised many Muslims into anti-imperial politics, but it also brought orthodox religious figures into public life and failed to convert religiously framed political energy into a sustained, secular nationalist outlook. When Gandhi called off the non-cooperation movement in 1922, the fragile alliance collapsed. The end of Khilafat (especially after Turkey abolished the Caliphate in 1924) removed the immediate religious rallying point and allowed communal identities and organisations to reassert themselves.

The 1920s and 1930s saw growing communal polarisation, with both Muslim and Hindu communal organisations becoming more active and militant. The Muslim League, cleansed of some of its earlier nationalist elements, began demanding separate representation and provincial safeguards, while Hindu groups responded with Shuddhi and Sangathan campaigns and the revival of the Hindu Mahasabha. Communal riots became frequent (notably Kohat 1924, Calcutta 1926, and many outbreaks across U.P. in 1923-27), exposing deeper economic and political anxieties, as well as fears over status, jobs, and political power behind the communal violence.



in the Mountbatten Plan (June 1947), the Radcliffe boundary commissions, and the hurried legal enactment of partition in July 1947. The practical problems of partition, including the absence of a single contiguous Muslim-majority belt, divided provinces like Punjab and Bengal, and conflicting local loyalties, made the process chaotic. The result was catastrophic: massive population transfers, communal massacres, abductions, and deep social trauma, with millions displaced and hundreds of thousands killed. Partition and independence thus emerged not as a single planned outcome but as the tragic end product of decades of communal politics, failed compromises, and the inability of political leaders and institutions to reconcile competing nationalisms.

As mentioned, the communal tensions that eventually erupted during Partition did not emerge suddenly in 1947; they had been building for decades. The rise of communal consciousness was closely linked to the social and economic transformations of colonial India. Economic stagnation, unequal access to modern education, and changing administrative structures created anxiety among various social groups, especially the emerging middle classes. Sections of both Hindu and Muslim elites saw communal politics as a means to secure economic benefits, political representation, and social prestige. As Bipan Chandra argued, communalism grew when groups began interpreting political and economic interests through religious categories rather than national unity.

Over the years, colonial policies such as the introduction of separate electorates in 1909, the communal award of 1932, and the imperial strategy of “divide and rule” institutionalised religious identity

in politics. Simultaneously, communal organisations such as the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, and RSS strengthened religious boundaries and encouraged mutual suspicion. By the 1940s, communal rhetoric had reached an extreme level, further intensified by the wartime atmosphere and political competition. The Direct Action Day call by the Muslim League in 1946, followed by riots in Calcutta, Noakhali, and Bihar, demonstrated how fragile communal relations had become. Thus, Partition violence was the culmination of a long process in which political rivalry, economic insecurity, and colonial manipulation merged into deep-rooted communal antagonism.

As communal tensions reached their peak, political negotiations failed to contain the growing mistrust. The announcement of Partition in June 1947 triggered an unprecedented movement of populations, transforming political division into a massive human crisis.

6.2.2.2 Mass Migrations

The announcement of Partition in August 1947 triggered one of the largest and most traumatic migrations in modern history. Between 12 and 15 million people were uprooted as the new borders between India and Pakistan were drawn. Hindus and Sikhs fled from West Punjab, Sindh, and the North-West Frontier Province into India, while Muslims left East Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and other parts of North India for Pakistan. This was not a normal or gradual migration; it was sudden, chaotic, and driven largely by fear, insecurity, and widespread violence. The journeys people undertook were extremely difficult and dangerous. Families travelled in whatever way they could—on foot, in bullock carts, in overcrowded trains, or in convoys briefly protected by military escorts. The most chilling symbol of the period was the “ghost train,” a train that crossed the border filled entirely with murdered passengers. These trains came to represent the complete collapse of safety and order in the face of communal hatred.

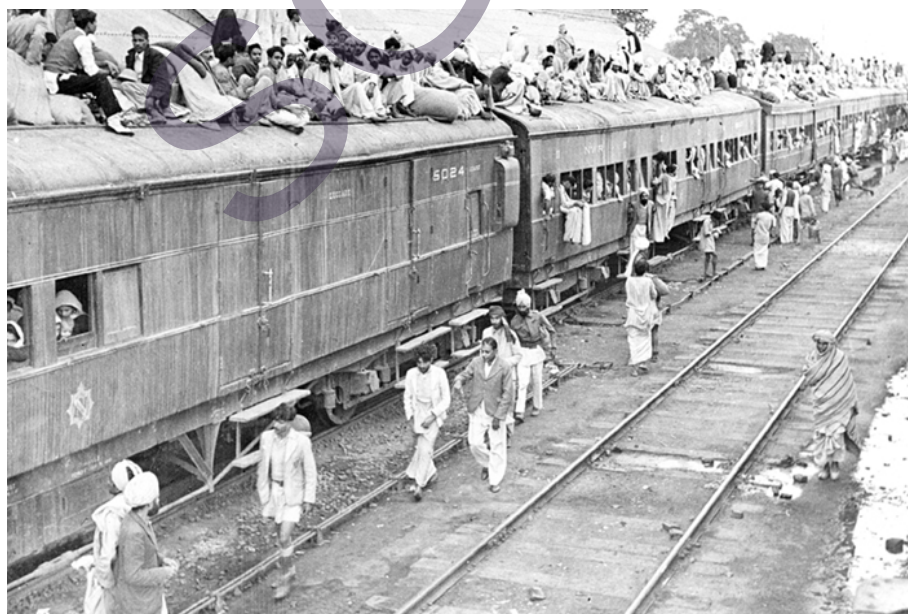


Fig 6.2.1 : A refugee special train at Ambala Station during the Partition of India

Source: Wikipedia

The migration routes themselves became killing fields. The Grand Trunk Road between Delhi and Lahore witnessed some of the worst attacks as mobs ambushed long caravans of refugees. Groups of tens of thousands walked for days with little water or food, often exposed to violence at any moment. In Punjab, whole villages tried to migrate together in the hope of protection, but even large groups could not always defend themselves. In the eastern regions, migration from East Bengal into West Bengal and Assam unfolded differently. It occurred in waves rather than all at once, especially after the Noakhali violence in 1946 and again in the early 1950s. This reflected ongoing insecurity rather than a single moment of collapse like that seen in Punjab.

This vast movement of people was far more than a demographic shift. It meant the destruction of entire social worlds that had existed for generations. Families left behind land cultivated for centuries, shops and businesses built slowly over time, and neighbourhood relationships that once made everyday life possible. Many were able to take hardly anything with them. For survivors, the journey became one of the most defining experiences of their lives. Their memories of fear, betrayal, sudden attacks, and also moments of unexpected compassion shaped community identities long after the migration ended.

6.2.2.3 Communal Riots in Punjab, Bengal, and Delhi

Punjab became the epicentre of partition violence. With deep political divisions between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, the announcement of the Radcliffe boundary inflamed tensions. After the Radcliffe Line was announced on 17 August 1947, targeted attacks rapidly escalated. In West Punjab, mobs sought to force Hindus and Sikhs out of Sheikhupura, Lahore, Sialkot, and

Rawalpindi. Villages were burned, travellers were assaulted, and women often bore the heaviest suffering. Retaliatory violence erupted in East Punjab, including in Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar, where Muslim communities faced counter-attacks. The resulting bloodshed created a cycle of revenge that made coexistence impossible.

In Bengal, the violence unfolded differently. Communal tensions had been rising since the Calcutta Killings of August 1946, followed by atrocities in Noakhali and Tippera. When Partition was announced, the Hindu exodus from East Bengal intensified. While Punjab saw sudden and explosive riots in a short span, Bengal witnessed periodic waves of violence over several years. In 1949, riots in East Bengal again led to mass movements into Calcutta, worsening the already strained urban situation.

Delhi became another epicentre of communal reprisal. As refugees from West Punjab poured into the city, many had witnessed horrors on their journeys. They carried anger, trauma, and mistrust. The city's demographic structure changed rapidly. Mobs targeted Muslim neighbourhoods, forcing many families to flee to camps or migrate to Pakistan. Large sections of Old Delhi, which had been home to centuries of Indo-Islamic culture, were transformed as violence displaced long-settled residents.

The riots across these regions were marked by organised attacks, a failure of administrative machinery, and the collapse of law and order. They revealed how deeply divided society had become and how rapidly communal hatred could explode into mass violence once political authority weakened. Among all the victims of the communal violence, women faced the most brutal atrocities. Their experiences reveal the darkest dimensions of Partition, where social, cultural, and political anxieties were enacted upon their bodies.

6.2.2.4 Impact on Women: Violence, Abduction, and Trauma

Women were the most vulnerable victims of Partition. Thousands of women across Punjab, Bengal, Delhi, and Sindh were abducted, raped, forcibly converted, or compelled into marriages against their will. Sexual violence was used as a weapon to dishonour communities, take revenge, or disrupt family structures. Many women were killed by their own families in the name of “honour,” particularly in Sikh and Hindu families in Punjab, who feared that their women would be captured by rival groups. Similarly, Muslim women were targeted in East Punjab and Delhi.

Women became symbolic targets of honour, revenge, and community pride, which turned their bodies into battlegrounds of communal hatred. Across Punjab and Bengal, women were raped, abducted, forcibly converted, married against their will, or killed to “protect family honour.” Cases were recorded where families committed collective suicide to avoid assault by mobs. Some women threw themselves into wells; others were shot by their own relatives. The scale of violence was staggering; historians estimate that around 75,000 women were abducted, though the actual number was likely higher.

The trauma women experienced did not end with the violence. Many abducted women were unwilling to return to their natal homes due to shame, social stigma, or fear of rejection. Others returned pregnant or with children, leading to painful dilemmas about identity, belonging, and acceptance. In some cases, families refused to take them back; in others, women chose to stay with the families they had been forced into, as returning home meant being treated as “dishonoured.”

Recognising the magnitude of the crisis, the governments of India and Pakistan began a coordinated effort to recover abducted women. Social workers such as Mridula Sarabhai and Rameshwari Nehru played critical roles in locating and rehabilitating survivors. By mid-1948, thousands of women had been recovered, though the process often involved additional trauma, as many women were forcibly “recovered” even if they did not wish to return. The violence against women remains one of the darkest chapters of Partition, revealing how communal conflict brutalised the most vulnerable members of society.

As violence and displacement continued, millions of refugees struggled to rebuild their lives in unfamiliar lands. This sets the stage for understanding the enormous rehabilitation challenges that followed.

The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India

Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* marks a major shift in Partition historiography by foregrounding the human dimensions of 1947 that official narratives long ignored. Although Partition displaced more than twelve million people, caused around a million deaths, and involved the abduction and rape of over seventy-five thousand women, much of this violence remained unspoken or suppressed. Butalia fills this gap by placing ordinary people, their pain, memories, and private experiences, at the centre of her study. Drawing on

a decade of interviews, as well as diaries, letters, memoirs, and parliamentary records, she brings to light the experiences of those usually absent from history: children, women, lower castes, and people whose lives were shattered by displacement and loss. By also reflecting on her own partition-scarred family story, she shows how trauma produces silence and how memory, pain, community, caste, and gender shape people's experiences of violence. The voices she captures reveal that, despite public silence, bitterness and grief remain alive in private spaces, and she argues that speaking these buried memories is essential for healing. Her work demonstrates how Partition's emotional and social ruptures continue to shape identities decades later and stands as a key contribution to understanding the lived realities of 1947.

6.2.2.5 Impact of Partition: Refugee Camps and Rehabilitation Challenges

The massive influx of refugees created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Makeshift camps sprang up across India, in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Kurukshetra, and numerous smaller towns. These camps suffered from overcrowding, poor sanitation, insufficient food, and inadequate medical facilities. Kurukshetra was considered to be the largest refugee camp in India. It housed more than 300,000 people, triple its intended capacity. Refugees lived in tents, temporary shelters, and open fields, often battling disease and hunger.

In Delhi, refugees occupied schools, colleges, temples, gurdwaras, railway platforms, and even parks. New colonies such as Lajpat Nagar, Rajendra Nagar, and Patel Nagar emerged as permanent settlements for displaced Hindu and Sikh families. In Bengal, refugee settlement was slower and more chaotic. Families occupied abandoned land, military barracks, railway lines, and marshy areas, forming self-governed colonies. Civil society groups, cooperatives, and social workers, such as

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in Faridabad, played a major role in rebuilding livelihoods through cooperatives, small industries, and relief networks. Beyond the immediate humanitarian crisis, Partition left long-term emotional and psychological scars.

Partition resulted in approximately 2 million deaths and the displacement of over 12 million people. Survivors suffered from trauma, survivor's guilt, nightmares, and a lifelong sense of loss. Many never recovered from the memories of violence, separation, or the disappearance of family members. The shattering of social networks, destruction of cultural spaces, and loss of ancestral homes created a sense of rootlessness that affected entire generations. In many cases, refugee children grew up with disrupted schooling, unstable family conditions, and a deep-seated fear of the "other community." Trauma often passed down to later generations through silence, stories, or inherited anxieties. Partition's psychological wounds became part of the collective memory and identity of northern India, Bengal, and Pakistan. For many families, the emotional cost of separation remains an unresolved chapter.

Violence, Martyrdom and Partition: A Daughter's Testimony

The book by Nonica Datta titled *Violence, Martyrdom and Partition: A Daughter's Testimony* presents the oral testimony of Subhashini (1914–2003), the head of a prominent Arya Samaj institution dedicated to women's education in rural north India, and brings into historical view a narrative long silenced within dominant accounts of Partition. Subhashini's memories evoke a complex landscape of violence, martyrdom, and belonging, in which the decisive rupture is not 1947 but 1942, marked by the martyrdom of her father, while Partition itself emerges as a moment simultaneously associated with celebration, revenge, divine justice, empathy, remorse, fear, and tragedy. Through the careful translation and interpretation of this oral testimony, Nonica Datta reconstructs the memory of a colonial subject living in postcolonial times, transforming personal recollection into historical narrative. Moving beyond established facts and event-centred histories, *Violence, Martyrdom and Partition* offers a parallel history of events and non-events, where memory and history, testimony and experience, intersect and unsettle conventional historical categories. By breaking the silence surrounding oral testimony and foregrounding memory as a legitimate historical archive, the work expands the terrain of historical inquiry and challenges rigid binaries such as subject and agent, victim and perpetrator, witness and survivor. Subhashini's candid, repetitive, and emotionally charged narrative reveals the intricate interplay between individual and collective remembrance, exposing the ambiguities, silences, contradictions, and shifting meanings that shape the afterlives of Partition.

Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory

Aanchal Malhotra's work adds another critical dimension to the study of Partition by approaching memory through material remnants and everyday objects. In *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory*, Malhotra traces how ordinary possessions, utensils, trunks, clothing, documents, photographs, and heirlooms carried by refugees across borders became silent witnesses to displacement and loss. These objects function as mnemonic devices, anchoring fragmented memories and emotions that often resist verbal articulation. By collecting family stories across India, Pakistan, and the diaspora, Malhotra demonstrates how material culture preserves affective histories of Partition, allowing descendants to access the past through touch, inheritance, and ritual rather than narrative alone. Her work shows that the memory of Partition is not only embedded in testimony but also lodged in things, where trauma, nostalgia, and belonging are negotiated across generations.



While the scale of the tragedy was overwhelming, various institutions stepped in to manage the crisis. Understanding their contribution reveals how India and Pakistan attempted to stabilise societies emerging from chaos. Both the governments of India and Pakistan faced enormous challenges in administering relief and rehabilitation. India established a comprehensive administrative machinery, including the Rehabilitation Secretariat in Punjab, which distributed land, arranged loans, and organised resettlement. New townships like Faridabad emerged through state-civil society partnerships, where organisations such as the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU) played a vital role in creating jobs and housing.

Civil society groups, including religious organisations, volunteer networks, women's groups, and international humanitarian workers, offered food, shelter, medical care, and emotional support. The United Council for Relief and Welfare (UCRW) coordinated assistance across multiple camps. Social workers took the lead in recovering abducted women, caring for orphaned children, and rebuilding community life. Despite these efforts, the scale of the crisis meant that rehabilitation remained a slow and uneven process, especially in Bengal. Even so, the combined efforts of government and civil society laid the foundation for the long-term resettlement of millions of displaced people.

Recap

- ◆ Partition emerged from long-term communal tensions shaped by colonial policies and socio-economic inequalities.
- ◆ Hindu-Muslim political competition intensified from the late nineteenth century onwards.
- ◆ Communal organisations on both sides deepened mistrust and rivalry.
- ◆ The Lahore Resolution (1940) gave formal political shape to the demand for Pakistan.
- ◆ The 1946 elections confirmed the Muslim League's dominance among Muslim voters.
- ◆ Partition triggered unprecedented communal violence across Punjab, Bengal, Delhi, and other regions.
- ◆ Women suffered enormously through abduction, rape, forced conversion, and social stigma.
- ◆ Around 12-15 million people migrated across the new borders, making it history's largest forced migration.
- ◆ Refugee camps struggled with overcrowding, disease, poor sanitation, and widespread trauma.
- ◆ Governments and civil society groups undertook massive rehabilitation efforts, but the emotional scars remained long-lasting.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the All India Muslim League established?
2. Which constitutional reform first introduced the system of Separate Electorates in India?
3. Name the two women activists who played a major role in rescuing abducted women after the Partition.
4. Which 1916 agreement marked temporary Hindu-Muslim unity but strengthened communal representation through separate electorates?
5. Which major movement between 1919 and 1922 brought Hindus and Muslims together under a shared anti-imperial cause linked to the Ottoman Caliphate?
6. What name is given to Jinnah's constitutional demands formulated in response to the Nehru Report?
7. What event announced by the Muslim League in August 1946 triggered large-scale communal riots across Bengal and other regions?
8. Which 1947 plan outlined the immediate steps for partition and the transfer of power from Britain to India and Pakistan?
9. Which 1928 constitutional proposal recommended joint electorates and provoked strong opposition from Jinnah and the Muslim League?
10. What commission, chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, was responsible for drawing the boundaries between India and Pakistan in 1947?

Answers

1. 1906
2. The Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909
3. Mridula Sarabhai and Rameshwari Nehru
4. The Lucknow Pact



5. The Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement
6. Jinnah's Fourteen Points
7. Direct Action Day
8. The Mountbatten Plan
9. The Nehru Report
10. The Radcliffe Boundary Commission

Assignments

1. Discuss the major causes of communal tensions leading up to the violence of 1947. How did long-term socio-economic and political factors shape these tensions?
2. Examine the scale and experience of mass migrations during Partition. How did different communities experience displacement?
3. Write a detailed account of the impact of Partition on women, focusing on violence, abduction, trauma, and state responses.
4. Analyse the functioning and challenges of refugee camps in any two regions-Punjab, Delhi, Bombay, or Calcutta.
5. Assess the long-term psychological effects of Partition on survivors and the role of governmental and civil-society organisations in post-Partition reconciliation.

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UNIT

Emergence of a New State

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the political crisis of early 1947 and the British decision to transfer power
- ◆ describe the circumstances and implications of the creation of India and Pakistan as sovereign nations
- ◆ evaluate the Mountbatten Plan and the Indian Independence Act of 1947
- ◆ analyse the formation of central and provincial governments in the newly created dominions
- ◆ discuss the early challenges of governance relating to administration, infrastructure, and finance
- ◆ understand the integration of princely states and Sardar Patel's role in state consolidation

Prerequisite

The emergence of India and Pakistan as sovereign states in 1947 was neither smooth nor uncontested. It was the result of decades of political negotiation, communal tension, constitutional experimentation, and declining British imperial power. By early 1947, the colonial state found itself unable to manage rising violence, political deadlock, and the massive administrative challenge of maintaining control over a subcontinent deeply divided along communal lines. When Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced a firm deadline for British withdrawal, it accelerated decisions that had been postponed for years. The process of Partition, though often

portrayed as quick and decisive, was, in reality, marked by hasty planning, unresolved questions, and inadequate administrative preparation. Within a few months, two dominions, India and Pakistan, emerged amid unprecedented displacement, violence, and confusion. The early years of independence were therefore shaped by efforts to build institutions, integrate princely states, restore economic stability, and cultivate a shared sense of national identity. This unit examines these complex processes, beginning with the creation of sovereign states and continuing through the political and administrative challenges of the immediate post-independence period.

Keywords

Mountbatten Plan, Indian Independence Act, Partition, State, Sovereign, Indian Civil Service, Integration of States

Discussion

6.3.1 Creation of India and Pakistan as Sovereign Nations

The origins of India and Pakistan as sovereign nations lie in the political crisis that unfolded during late 1946 and early 1947. The refusal of the Muslim League to participate in the Constituent Assembly, combined with its insistence on a separate state of Pakistan, created a constitutional deadlock. The Congress, frustrated by communal violence and the League's intransigence, threatened to withdraw from the Interim Government. In response, the British government took a decisive step. On 20 February 1947, Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that British power in India would be transferred no later than June 1948. This announcement dramatically altered the political atmosphere. It acknowledged the possibility of Partition and indicated that

British treaty obligations toward princely states would end with their departure, thereby creating uncertainty about the future shape of the subcontinent.

This public commitment was partly motivated by Britain's exhaustion after World War II, the economic cost of maintaining an empire, and the fear of escalating communal violence. The task of managing the withdrawal was assigned to Lord Louis Mountbatten, who replaced Lord Wavell as Viceroy in March 1947. Under his tenure, the process of transfer of power accelerated rapidly, culminating in the creation of the two new dominions, India and Pakistan, on 15 August 1947. The political birth of the two dominions required administrative machinery capable of governing large and diverse populations. Let us now look at the formation of central and provincial governments in both India and Pakistan.

6.3.1.1 Formation of Central and Provincial Governments

Central Governments

The creation of two nations required not only constitutional legitimacy but also functioning governments at the central and provincial levels. Both dominions inherited fragments of the colonial administrative apparatus and needed to reconstruct them almost overnight. India's government was built upon the framework of the Constituent Assembly, which acted both as a constitution-making body and as a legislative authority. Jawaharlal Nehru became the first Prime Minister, with a Cabinet drawn largely from Congress but also representing regional and social diversities. The central government's immediate responsibilities included handling refugee rehabilitation, restoring public order, and managing the wartime economic crisis. Meanwhile, Pakistan faced an even more daunting task. It had to build a capital in Karachi, establish a central secretariat from scratch, and attract administrative personnel from India. Muhammad Ali Jinnah became the Governor-General, while Liaquat Ali Khan served as Prime Minister. Pakistan's share of military, financial, and administrative assets was delayed or denied during the transfer, further complicating its early governance.

Provincial Governments

Provincial assemblies, especially in Punjab and Bengal, were deeply affected by Partition. Their political composition changed dramatically, and large-scale demographic movements made administration chaotic. The North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) became particularly contested, as the Congress-led ministry could not prevent the region from joining Pakistan despite considerable local demand for an independent Pathan state. The structural weaknesses of the new governments soon became evident,

especially when they attempted to address the urgent challenges of governance in terms of administration, finance, and infrastructure.

6.3.1.2 Challenges in Administration, Infrastructure and Economy

The immediate aftermath of independence was marked by severe administrative dislocation and intense resource scarcity. Partition uprooted millions, disrupted supply chains, and paralysed essential public institutions, leaving the newly formed governments struggling to manage humanitarian crises while simultaneously laying the foundations of sovereign rule. One of the first challenges emerged from the division of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), which had previously held the administrative machinery together; with many experienced officers either opting for Pakistan or choosing early retirement, district administrations in several regions collapsed amid widespread violence and the abrupt departure of British officials.

Adding to this turmoil, critical infrastructure such as railways, telegraphs, postal systems, and canals suffered major setbacks as the division of Punjab and Bengal severed long-established networks of trade and communication, while refugee trains, frequently attacked or derailed, came to symbolise the fragile control over transportation systems. Compounding these institutional and logistical crises was a dire economic situation: wartime inflation had driven prices up, food shortages persisted, and the new governments lacked reliable revenue sources. Tensions further escalated when Pakistan demanded its agreed share of cash reserves, and although the amount had been determined, political disagreements delayed the transfer, deepening financial instability during these already turbulent months.

Despite these challenges, both dominions took steps to stabilise their economies and rebuild administrative structures. India, in particular, benefitted from a relatively larger industrial base and political continuity. While both India and Pakistan struggled with governance, another urgent issue loomed large. The status of over 560 princely states required political integration for the territorial consolidation of the new nations.

6.3.2 Integration of Princely States

At the moment of British withdrawal, the future of more than 560 princely states became one of the gravest uncertainties for the subcontinent. The lapse of British paramountcy, as announced in Attlee's statement of February 1947, meant that the princely states were no longer legally bound to the British Crown. They were theoretically free to choose independence or to accede to either India or Pakistan. This situation created a 'dangerous' possibility of political fragmentation, a "Balkanisation" of India, something the national leadership, especially Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was determined to prevent. Patel, acting as the Minister for States, worked closely with V.P. Menon, a senior civil servant and constitutional advisor. Their approach combined persuasion, political pressure, administrative incentives, and, in rare cases, the threat of military action. The Instrument of Accession (IoA) became the main constitutional tool, limiting accession to three subjects- defence, external affairs, and communications- thus assuring rulers that their internal autonomy would remain intact.

Phase I: Initial Accession (Before 15 August 1947)

By Independence Day, most states, except Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Kashmir, had signed the IoA. This relatively smooth

phase was possible because many rulers had never exercised meaningful sovereignty and relied on British protection. Privy purses, guaranteed titles, and the ceremonial respect offered by Patel reassured many princes.

Phase II: Full Integration (1947–1948)

Once accession was secured, the next stage involved merging states into viable administrative units. Many small states in Kathiawar, Central India, and Rajasthan lacked governance structures and fiscal capacity. Through negotiations and political reorganisation, new entities like Saurashtra, Vindhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, and Rajasthan emerged. Some rulers were offered positions such as Rajpramukhs (heads of the newly formed unions), ensuring symbolic continuity while transferring real power to democratic institutions.

6.3.2.1 Manipur

Before India became independent, Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh of Manipur signed the Instrument of Accession, maintaining internal autonomy. Under public pressure, Manipur held elections in June 1948, the first in India based on universal adult franchise, and became a constitutional monarchy. However, political parties disagreed on merging with India. The State Congress supported the merger, while others opposed it. In 1949, under pressure from the Government of India, the Maharaja signed the Merger Agreement without consulting the elected Assembly, which created resentment among the people.

6.3.2.2 Junagadh

Junagadh was a princely state entirely surrounded by Indian territory. The Nawab of Junagadh chose to join Pakistan on 15 August 1947, although most of the population, mainly Hindus, preferred India. Pakistan accepted



Junagadh's accession, but the people revolted, forcing the Nawab to flee. The Diwan, Shah Nawaz Bhutto, asked India to intervene. Indian troops entered, and a plebiscite in February 1948 showed overwhelming support for joining India, settling the issue.

6.3.2.3 Jammu & Kashmir

The Maharaja hesitated between independence and accession. When tribal invaders supported by Pakistan entered the region in October 1947, he signed the Instrument of Accession with India. This led to war, the involvement of the United Nations, and the beginning of the still-unresolved Kashmir conflict. Kashmir, ruled by Maharaja Hari Singh (a Hindu), had a Muslim-majority population. The Maharaja initially wanted to remain independent. Meanwhile, Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference supported joining India. On 22 October 1947, tribesmen backed by Pakistan invaded Kashmir. Unable to resist, the Maharaja sought India's help. India agreed on the condition that he sign the Instrument of Accession, which he did on 26 October 1947. Sheikh Abdullah became head of the state government.

Indian troops were sent to defend Kashmir and pushed back the raiders, but parts of the territory were already occupied, leading to prolonged fighting. India took the issue to the UN Security Council in January 1948. Instead of treating it as Pakistani aggression, the UN reframed it as an India-Pakistan dispute. A ceasefire was implemented, dividing Kashmir along a ceasefire line (later the Line of Control). The UN called for a plebiscite, conditional on Pakistan withdrawing its troops, which never happened. India considered Kashmir's accession final and irrevocable, while Pakistan continued to dispute it, making Kashmir the central issue between the two nations.

6.3.2.4 Travancore

Travancore's Dewan, C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, announced intentions for independence but withdrew his claim after political agitation and an assassination attempt. Jawaharlal Nehru invited the Diwan of Travancore, C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, to Delhi in an effort to convince him to sign the Instrument of Accession. However, the Diwan initially refused. His rule was widely unpopular, especially among the people and the Communists in the region, leading to several clashes, most notably the Punnappra-Vayalar uprising of 1946. Amid rising tensions, the Diwan even announced that Travancore intended to remain independent. He soon faced multiple assassination attempts, and surviving one of these attacks reportedly caused him to reconsider his stance. Ultimately, on 30 July 1947, Travancore agreed to join the Indian Union.

6.3.2.5 Hyderabad

Hyderabad, ruled by the Nizam Mir Osman Ali, attempted to remain independent. He strengthened his military and negotiated with India while secretly seeking support from Pakistan. Communal tensions escalated as the Razakars, a paramilitary group, attacked civilians. The Hyderabad State Congress and peasants in Telangana launched movements demanding democracy and protection. After prolonged violence and the Nizam's refusal to cooperate, India launched a police action (Operation Polo) on 13 September 1948. Hyderabad surrendered within three days and acceded to India in November 1948. The Nizam was not punished and retained certain privileges along with a privy purse.

The integration of princely states was then completed. Many small states were merged into unions such as Rajasthan, Madhya Bharat, Saurashtra, PEPSU, and Travancore-Cochin. Larger states like

Mysore, Hyderabad, and Jammu & Kashmir remained separate. Rulers were granted privy purses, titles, and certain privileges as part of the agreement, which were later protected by the Constitution.

Patel's success in integrating princely states ensured the territorial unity of India and prevented the emergence of fragmented mini-states. With the political map consolidated, the new Indian state had to contend with severe economic dislocation. Let us examine the economic challenges and national priorities that shaped early development policies.

6.3.3 Economy: Challenges and Priorities

The economic conditions inherited at independence were deeply troubling. Years of war expenditure, communal violence, and the disruption of markets due to Partition created financial instability across the subcontinent. Partition divided irrigation systems, severed railway lines, disrupted trade networks, and separated agricultural regions from their traditional markets. Punjab's canal colonies were split. Bengal lost its jute-producing areas to East Pakistan but retained the mills. Industries dependent on mineral resources, oil, and skilled labour suffered significant shortages. India faced soaring inflation, declining agricultural output, and a chronic shortage of food grains. Refugee

rehabilitation required enormous expenditure. Pakistan suffered even more, as much of its banking, commercial, and administrative infrastructure had been located in Indian cities and had to be rebuilt from scratch. Pakistan's share of cash balances was delayed, further worsening its financial crisis.

India adopted a strategy that combined state-led industrialisation, public sector expansion, and planned economic development. Though formal planning began with the First Five Year Plan (1951), the foundations were laid between 1947 and 1950 through the establishment of the Planning Commission, the strengthening of state control over crucial industries, the expansion of irrigation and power projects, increases in food production, and efforts to stabilise prices and revive trade. Despite these intentions, implementation remained uneven. Land reforms often faced resistance from landlords, and ceilings on land holdings were poorly enforced. Nevertheless, the period witnessed significant experimentation and political commitment to economic transformation. India's adoption of a non-aligned foreign policy under Nehru had significant economic implications. By refusing to align fully with either the American or Soviet blocs, India sought to preserve economic autonomy and protect domestic industry.

Recap

- ◆ The British, facing political deadlock and rising violence, announced their decision to quit India by June 1948.
- ◆ Mountbatten accelerated the transfer of power, which led to the creation of India and Pakistan on 15 August 1947.
- ◆ The division of provinces like Punjab and Bengal caused massive displacement and an administrative breakdown.



- ◆ Both dominions struggled to form effective central and provincial governments.
- ◆ The administrative machinery weakened due to the departure of experienced officers and the disruption of civil services.
- ◆ Economic challenges included inflation, food shortages, and damaged infrastructure.
- ◆ Patel and V.P. Menon integrated more than 560 princely states through diplomacy and strategic pressure.
- ◆ Difficult states like Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Kashmir required special interventions, including military action.
- ◆ India adopted economic planning, public sector expansion, and a non-aligned foreign policy to stabilise the new nation.
- ◆ Nation-building required refugee rehabilitation, the protection of minorities, and the creation of a democratic constitution.

Objective Questions

1. Who announced the British decision to leave India by June 1948?
2. Which plan proposed the transfer of power to separate provinces or confederations?
3. Who strongly opposed Plan Balkan, leading to its abandonment?
4. Which legal document enabled princely states to join India or Pakistan?
5. Which princely state was integrated into India through Operation Polo?
6. Who chaired the Boundary Commissions responsible for drawing borders in 1947?
7. Who became the first Governor-General of Pakistan?

8. Which Indian leader played the central role in integrating princely states?
9. With which state was Travancore merged to form a new union?
10. Who signed the Instrument of Accession for Manipur?
11. In which year was the Junagadh plebiscite held?
12. What was the Indian military action in Hyderabad called?

Answers

1. Clement Attlee
2. Plan Balkan
3. Jawaharlal Nehru
4. Instrument of Accession
5. Hyderabad
6. Sir Cyril Radcliffe
7. Muhammad Ali Jinnah
8. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel
9. Cochin
10. Bodhachandra
11. 1948
12. Polo

Assignments

1. Discuss the political conditions in early 1947 that pushed the British government to announce a rapid transfer of power.
2. Evaluate the Mountbatten Plan and the extent to which it shaped the creation of India and Pakistan.
3. Analyse Sardar Patel's strategies and methods in integrating the princely states into the Indian Union.
4. Explain the economic challenges faced by India immediately after independence and how they influenced national priorities.
5. Assess the socio-cultural tasks of nation-building in post-Partition India, with reference to refugee rehabilitation and constitutional development.

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UNIT

Legacies of the National Movement

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify the key phases of the Indian freedom struggle
- ◆ discuss the contributions of major figures in the Indian national movement
- ◆ examine how the national movement forged a sense of national unity
- ◆ evaluate how the movement shaped India's democratic institutions and political processes

Prerequisite

The Indian national movement was much more than a series of protests against British rule; it laid the foundations for what the modern Indian state would become after 1947. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leaders, reformers, thinkers, and millions of ordinary people developed a set of core ideas: democracy, civil liberties, secularism, social justice, and economic self-reliance. These ideas shaped the political imagination of the freedom struggle and later became guiding principles of the Indian republic. Although the British introduced administrative systems, railways, courts, and other institutions, it was the nationalist movement that provided the values and vision that filled these structures with meaning. Through decades of debate, organisation, and political struggle, nationalists insisted on representative government, on civil liberties as rights that applied to all people, and on an inclusive idea of the Indian nation, one that aimed to respect linguistic, cultural,

and religious diversity rather than erase it. Questions such as how to balance unity with diversity, how to protect individual freedoms while pursuing social justice, and how much the state should intervene in the economy are not new; they are extensions of arguments that began during the freedom movement. In this sense, the nationalist period created both the ideals and the dilemmas that continue to shape Indian democracy.

Keywords

Mass Mobilisation, Satyagraha, Secularism, Economic Self-Reliance, Unity in Diversity, Non-Alignment

Discussion

6.4.1 Mass Mobilisation and Political Culture

After 1919, the Indian national movement changed dramatically and became a genuine mass movement. Earlier political activity had mostly involved educated elites and small, local struggles. However, with Gandhi's entry into national politics and the deep economic and social pressures created by colonial rule, nationalism spread into everyday life. Villages and towns that had once been outside formal politics now saw hartals, picketing, satyagraha gatherings, and khadi stalls. This participation taught ordinary people to see themselves as political subjects who had the right to make demands on the state.

This large-scale politicisation had important consequences. It made the call for universal adult franchise believable because millions had already experienced political action in some form. It pushed nationalist leaders to address issues faced by peasants, workers, and other groups whose concerns could no longer be ignored. It also familiarised people with collective action and public participation, practices that would later become part of electoral democracy.

6.4.2 Satyagraha, Non-violence and Moral Authority

Satyagraha, Gandhi's method of non-violent resistance, combined strong moral arguments with carefully organised collective action. Unlike underground conspiracies or violent revolts that could be carried out by a small group, satyagraha depended on the participation, or at least the support, of large numbers of ordinary people. It also relied on winning sympathy from the wider public. As a method, marches, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience transformed everyday actions into public statements that highlighted the moral failure of colonial rule. At the same time, participating in these actions provided ordinary people with a new kind of political training, teaching them discipline, self-control, and the importance of persuasion rather than force.

The moral power of satyagraha was based not just on Gandhi's personal lifestyle but on the broader public ethic it promoted. It insisted that the means used in politics were just as important as the *goals*. This idea influenced later expectations in independent

India, shaping how leaders spoke about political responsibility and how citizens judged public behaviour. In this way, satyagraha helped define both the style and the moral language of Indian democracy.

6.4.3 Democratic Practices within the Congress and Civil Liberties

From its very beginning, the Indian National Congress functioned as a space where people argued, voted, and worked towards collective decisions. The intense internal debates that preceded major actions, such as launching the Non-Cooperation or Civil Disobedience movements, were not empty rituals. They helped build a political culture in which disagreement was normal and decisions were reached through discussion and majority opinion. By allowing internal dissent and encouraging open voting, the Congress helped develop norms like majority rule, respect for minority views, and public deliberation. These habits later shaped the actual structure of India's constitutional system. Just as crucial was the Congress's commitment to civil liberties. It consistently defended freedom of speech, the press, and association, even for critics and rival groups. Leaders from Tilak to Nehru argued that such freedoms were essential for a healthy political community, directly rejecting colonial claims that Indians were unfit for democratic governance.

The movement's political culture influenced not only democratic institutions and habits but also a shared economic imagination. Although Congress leaders often disagreed, they developed a broad vision of economic self-reliance, social justice, and state-led development. This vision played a significant role in shaping India's post-colonial development strategy.

6.4.4 Economic Critique of Colonialism and the Idea of Self-Reliance

Indian nationalists developed a strong and systematic critique of the colonial economy. They argued that British rule had caused deep economic harm through the deindustrialisation of traditional sectors, heavy revenue extraction from peasants, and trade policies that favoured British manufacturers over Indian producers. These processes, they believed, kept India dependent and pushed large parts of the population into poverty. In response, nationalist thinkers began to outline a vision of economic self-reliance. This did not mean shutting India off from the world; rather, it meant developing India's own productive capacities so the country would no longer be subordinate to foreign capital or external markets.

To achieve this, nationalists proposed a mixed economic strategy. They stressed the need for heavy industries, especially capital goods and basic industries, to be built under state direction. At the same time, they wanted to protect and promote small-scale and cottage industries as important sources of employment. Many also argued for agrarian reforms that would strengthen the position of cultivators and improve rural livelihoods. These ideas appeared in documents such as the Karachi Resolution and in the work of the National Planning Committee. Together, they formed the ideological foundation for the state-led development model that independent India adopted after 1947.

6.4.5 Class, Socialism and Social Reform

By the late colonial period, socialist ideas had become an important force within the nationalist movement. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and groups such as the Congress Socialist Party promoted



programmes that went far beyond the goal of political freedom. They argued that true independence required social and economic transformation as well. Their agenda included land reform, relief for indebted peasants, better rights and protections for workers, and expanded access to education. Nationalists also forged alliances with women's rights activists and anti-untouchability campaigns, recognising that political freedom would be incomplete without changes in everyday social relations. Although socialism never became the official or sole ideology of the Congress, it significantly influenced the movement's broader direction. It pushed the struggle for independence toward more egalitarian goals and ensured that the pursuit of social justice would remain central to India's political life after 1947.

6.4.6 Secularism: Doctrines and Practice

Secularism developed within the national movement as both a moral principle and a political response to the rise of communalism. Two major strands shaped this idea. Gandhi promoted *sarva dharma sambhava*, or equal respect for all religions, which reflected a pluralist and ethical approach that valued every faith tradition. Nehru, on the other hand, argued for *dharma nirpekshata*, meaning that the state should remain neutral toward religion and keep religious matters separate from government functions. Together, these approaches influenced the constitutional design of independent India, which promised freedom of religion, banned discrimination on religious grounds, and required the state to act impartially toward all communities.

In practice, the national movement expressed its secularism through political behaviour: refusing to mobilise support along communal lines, defending minority rights in courts and legislatures, and consistently

criticising communalist organisations. This long-standing ethos made secularism a core constitutional value. At the same time, translating this ideal into actual policy after independence would remain a challenge and a source of ongoing debate in Indian politics.

6.4.7 Nation-in-the-Making: Unity, Diversity and Integration

Nationalists were deeply aware that India's sense of nationhood was new and potentially fragile. To address this, they adopted a dual strategy: building a common, pan-Indian political culture while also acknowledging the country's many linguistic, cultural, and regional identities. The famous idea of "unity in diversity" was not just a slogan; it was a practical method for nation-building. It meant that differences would not be suppressed but given space within a federal system, even as shared civic values and mass mobilisation helped create emotional links across communities. The Congress played a central role in this process. Its all-India presence, its effort to bring leaders from different provinces into a single organisation, and its attempts to include workers, peasants, and women within a common political programme all helped shape a broad political identity. This identity, built on both diversity and shared purpose, was crucial for sustaining a large and highly varied country like India.

6.4.8 Foreign Policy and Internationalism

The national movement's approach to the world was shaped by a mix of anti-colonial solidarity and a principled opposition to fascism and racism. Nehru believed India should stand with progressive, anti-imperialist movements across the globe, but without falling into narrow nationalism or aggressive patriotism. Gandhi, too, took firm moral

positions on international events, openly condemning genocidal violence in the 1930s and 1940s. This global outlook directly influenced India's foreign policy after independence. Policies such as non-alignment, support for decolonisation, and commitment to peaceful coexistence were clear continuations of the values developed during the freedom struggle. Importantly, Indian nationalism avoided hostility toward entire nations or peoples, including the former colonisers. Its critique focused on imperial systems, not on individuals or populations. This distinction made it easier for independent India to pursue practical and balanced diplomatic relations in the post-1947 world.

6.4.9 Political Norms: Accommodation and Public Ethics

Finally, the national movement left behind an ethical vocabulary that continued to shape Indian politics after independence. Ideas such

as compromise, respect for dissent, and a public morality grounded in personal integrity became part of political expectations. The Congress itself had been a highly plural organisation, bringing together Trotskyists, Gandhians, moderates, and conservatives under a single umbrella. This internal diversity taught future leaders the skills of coalition-building, negotiation, and managing disagreement, skills that later became essential in a democratic system. Ordinary citizens, too, gained experience in exercising rights and responsibilities through their participation in mass movements, which helped ease the shift from anti-colonial struggle to democratic governance. At the same time, this ethical legacy did not automatically sustain itself. As party politics became more professionalised and movements turned into formal institutions, some of the earlier moral consensus and the tradition of personal honesty weakened. This decline is an important point for contemporary students to reflect upon, as it highlights the distance between the ideals of the national movement and later political practice.

Recap

- ◆ The national movement mobilised large sections of Indian society into politics and public action.
- ◆ Gandhi's method of satyagraha taught collective discipline and moral politics to millions.
- ◆ The Congress functioned as a deliberative, democratic body long before independence.
- ◆ Defence of civil liberties was central to nationalist political culture.
- ◆ Nationalists offered a sustained critique of colonial economic extraction and advocated self-reliant development.
- ◆ The movement combined support for heavy industry with protection for small-scale enterprise.



- ◆ Socialists within the movement deepened its commitment to social justice and land reform.
- ◆ Secularism, state neutrality, and equal respect for religions were made foundational values.
- ◆ The movement consciously promoted India as a nation-in-the-making, accommodating diversity.

Objective Questions

1. Which leader's entry into national politics transformed the Indian freedom struggle into a mass movement after 1919?
2. What form of collective action turned everyday behaviour into political resistance under Gandhi?
3. What key economic problem did nationalists identify in colonial rule regarding traditional industries?
4. Which nationalist body laid the groundwork for India's future state-led industrial planning?
5. Which two complementary ideas shaped the nationalist understanding of secularism?
6. What concept expressed the idea that India could be united despite its many linguistic and cultural identities?
7. Which resolution of the Indian National Congress in 1931 combined political rights with socio-economic commitments such as labour rights and social justice?
8. Which movement between 1919 and 1922 helped transform ordinary Indians into active political participants through hartals, boycotts, and civil disobedience?
9. Which idea within the national movement emphasised India's need to build its own industrial and economic base rather than rely on colonial trade structures?
10. Which national leader argued that India should align with global anti-imperialist and anti-fascist movements, shaping the country's later foreign policy of non-alignment?

Answers

1. Gandhi
2. Satyagraha
3. Deindustrialisation
4. National Planning Committee
5. Sarva Dharma Sambhava & Dharma Nirpekshata
6. Unity in Diversity
7. Karachi Resolution
8. Non-Cooperation Movement
9. Economic self-reliance
10. Jawaharlal Nehru

Assignments

1. How did the Indian National Movement contribute to India's socio-political and economic transformation?
2. Analyse the impact of the national movement on the framing of the Indian Constitution and on the emergence of political institutions such as universal adult franchise and federalism.
3. How did the interplay between Gandhian and Nehruvian ideas shape the economic policy choices of early independent India?
4. Explain how secularism moved from a moral ideal within the nationalist movement to a constitutional principle. Evaluate major post-independence challenges to this ideal.
5. Critically assess the claim that the national movement bequeathed a culture of democratic accommodation to independent India.



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UNIT

Making of the Indian Constitution

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the formation, composition and working of the Constituent Assembly
- ◆ evaluate Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's contribution and the role of other principal framers
- ◆ analyse debates on citizenship, fundamental rights and democracy
- ◆ compare federal and unitary models as negotiated in the Constitution

Prerequisite

The Indian Constitution is both the legal foundation and the moral framework of the Indian Republic. It emerged from an unusually detailed and participatory constitution-making process that blended long-standing Indian political debates with selective borrowing from global constitutional models. It represented the culmination of decades of historical development, from colonial administrative experiments and successive reform Acts to the intense constitutional politics of the 1930s and 1940s. All of this work finally took institutional shape in the Constituent Assembly, which met between 1946 and 1949. The Constitution that resulted from these debates attempted to balance several competing goals, such as preserving national unity while respecting diversity, protecting individual liberty while advancing social justice, maintaining a strong central government while giving meaningful powers to the provinces, and adopting parliamentary democracy alongside safeguards for minorities and vulnerable groups. By studying how the Constitution was made, we

gain insight into why India's political system functions as it does today and why many current debates about rights, federalism, secularism, or minority protections can be traced directly back to arguments first articulated during the Constituent Assembly era.

Keywords

Constituent Assembly, Drafting Committee, Objective Resolution, Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, Union-State relations, Federalism, Secularism, Universal Adult Franchise

Discussion

6.5.1 Constituent Assembly

6.5.1.1 Formation

The Constituent Assembly of India was created during the last years of British rule, when the British were trying to plan a smooth transfer of power. After years of nationalist pressure and several rounds of negotiations, such as the Cripps Mission in 1942 and the Cabinet Mission in 1946, the British finally agreed that Indians could set up a body to write their own Constitution.

According to the Cabinet Mission Plan, members of the Constituent Assembly would not be elected directly by the people. Instead, they would be chosen by the provincial legislative assemblies. Seats in the Assembly were distributed among the British Indian provinces and the princely states. Elections were held in 1946, and the Assembly met for the first time on 9 December 1946. However, events soon changed the situation. The demand for Pakistan and the growing conflict between the Congress and the Muslim League eventually led to the Partition of India in 1947. Muslim League members withdrew from the Assembly and formed a separate Assembly for Pakistan. Despite these challenges, the Indian Constituent Assembly

continued its work. It included representatives from the provinces that remained in India and, later, members from princely states that agreed to join India. This Assembly successfully completed the major task of drafting the Constitution of independent India.

6.5.1.2 Composition and Representation

The composition of the Constituent Assembly reflected the political compromises of its time. Because members were not directly elected by all adults but were chosen by the provincial legislatures, the Assembly was mainly composed of Congress members and influential leaders from different regions and communities. Even so, the Assembly was quite diverse, including people of various religions, regions, and ideologies. Among its members were experienced politicians, lawyers, social reformers, and representatives of the Depressed Classes, Scheduled Tribes, and religious minorities. Well-known national leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, K. M. Munshi, and many others brought both intellectual strength and political experience to the Assembly.



Fig 6.5.1: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Source: Wikipedia

Some critics argued that the lack of direct elections was a democratic weakness, as ordinary people could not vote for the members. Supporters, however, contended that indirect elections made the process faster, calmer, and more practical during a very unstable period in Indian history. Because many members were experienced administrators and legal experts, the debates balanced high ideals with realistic ideas of governance. The nature of the Assembly also influenced how it operated. Since drafting a constitution is a monumental task, the Assembly relied heavily on committees to study issues in detail and prepare reports.

6.5.1.3 Working Methods and Procedures

The Constituent Assembly followed a careful, discussion-based method to write the Constitution. Its work began with the Objective Resolution, introduced on 13 December 1946. This resolution laid down the basic ideals and goals of the

future Constitution and later became the philosophical foundation of the Preamble.

To manage the vast amount of work, the Assembly formed many committees, each responsible for a specific area, such as fundamental rights, the Union constitution, or provincial powers. These committees researched issues, debated alternatives, and prepared draft proposals.

The Constitution was discussed in three stages:

1. First reading - general discussion of broad principles.
2. Second reading - a long, detailed, clause-by-clause debate.
3. Third reading - final approval of the entire document.

The Assembly's meetings were open to the public, and detailed transcripts were kept. This allowed scholars, journalists, and citizens to follow the debates closely. The Assembly combined significant moral and political debates with careful technical drafting. Members drew on comparative studies of other constitutions and received expert help, especially from Sir B. N. Rau, who prepared the first draft that guided the later discussions. This mix of open debate and expert input helped the Assembly create a Constitution that balanced lofty ideals (justice, liberty, equality) with practical and workable institutions.

6.5.2 Enactment of the Constitution

On 4th November 1948, B. R. Ambedkar presented the first reading of the draft Constitution before the Constituent Assembly. The second reading began on 15th November 1948 and continued until 17th October 1949, during which numerous amendments were

proposed and debated. The third reading commenced on 14th November 1949, and the Draft Constitution was finally approved on 26th November 1949. Although the Assembly had 299 members, 284 members signed the Constitution.

The Constitution adopted on 26th November 1949 consisted of the Preamble, 395 Articles, and 8 Schedules. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar played a vital role in the drafting process, earning him the title “Father of the Indian Constitution.”

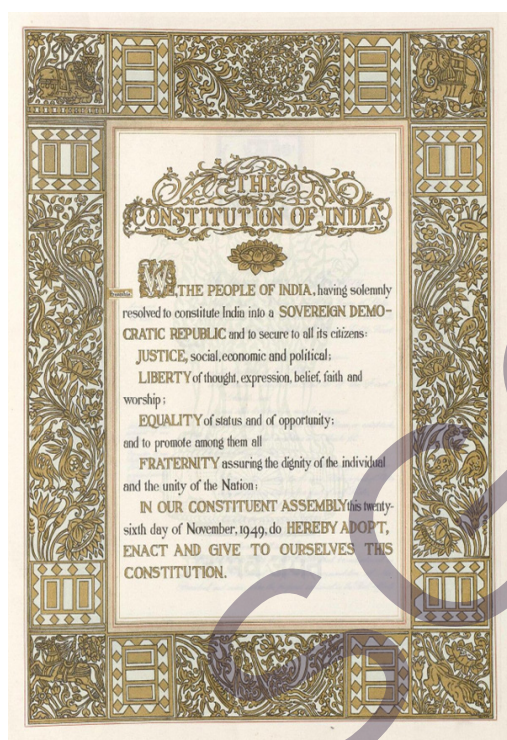


Fig 6.5.2 : Constitution of India

Source: Wikipedia

6.5.2.1 Committees and their Contributions

The Constituent Assembly carried out its work through a system of committees, and their reports became the foundation of the Constitution. The most important of these was the Drafting Committee, set up on 29 August 1947 and chaired by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. This committee prepared the final text of the Constitution and ensured that

all amendments approved by the Assembly were properly included.

Several other major committees also played key roles:

- ◆ Union Powers Committee and Committee on Union Constitution - examined how powers should be divided between the Centre and the states.
- ◆ Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities, chaired by Sardar Patel - dealt with civil liberties and minority protections.
- ◆ Provincial Constitution Committee- focused on the structure and powers of provincial (state) governments.
- ◆ Steering Committee - coordinated the Assembly's overall timetable and workflow.
- ◆ Various sub-committees - worked on specialised areas like the judiciary, public services, and administrative organisation.

These committees studied other countries' constitutions, borrowing ideas such as the British parliamentary system, the U.S. Bill of Rights, the Irish Directive Principles, and German emergency powers, but adapted them to Indian historical and social conditions. Their reports transformed the Assembly's discussions into clear, workable constitutional clauses, helping to balance individual rights, social welfare goals, and effective institutions.

6.5.2.2 Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Other Framers

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, played a uniquely important role in shaping the Indian Constitution. He took the Assembly's resolutions, committee reports, and advisory

notes and turned them into clear, consistent constitutional language. Ambedkar also defended difficult or controversial provisions during the Assembly's debates, using his legal expertise and comparisons with other countries to explain why certain institutions or structures were necessary. His influence can be seen in key areas such as fundamental rights, protections for minorities, federal relations, and administrative law.

However, Ambedkar did not work alone. The Constitution was the result of teamwork and the combined strengths of several major leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru provided broad political direction and shaped the ideals of the Constitution, especially through the Objective Resolution. Sardar Patel played a practical role, particularly in matters of national unity, the integration of princely states, and the administrative framework. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, as President of the Assembly, guided discussions smoothly and handled disagreements within the House. K. M. Munshi, S. P. Mukherjee, and others offered important legal ideas and policy suggestions. Ambedkar's leadership ensured that their many ideas were woven into a coherent, workable Constitution.

The Drafting Committee's version of the Constitution also sparked intense debates in the Assembly on major issues such as citizenship, fundamental rights, and the nature of Indian democracy. These discussions were crucial in shaping the final character of the Indian state.

6.5.3 Debates on Citizenship, Fundamental Rights and Democracy

6.5.3.1 Citizenship

The Constituent Assembly discussed citizenship at a time when Partition had caused massive migration, violence, and

uncertainty about people's loyalties. The Assembly had to decide who would be considered an Indian citizen in this new situation. The final provisions combined *jus soli* (citizenship by birth in India) with rules for refugees, displaced persons, and people from princely states. Special transitional arrangements were made to deal with the exceptional conditions of 1947-48.

6.5.3.2 Fundamental Rights

The Assembly also debated how to balance individual freedoms with the need for social justice. On one hand, it wanted to ensure strong civil liberties such as equality, freedom of speech and religion, cultural and educational rights, protection from exploitation, and the right to constitutional remedies. These rights were made justiciable, meaning people could go to court to enforce them. On the other hand, the framers knew that India needed social reforms to overcome caste discrimination, poverty, and inequality. Therefore, they added the Directive Principles of State Policy, which guide the government to work toward social welfare, even though these principles cannot be enforced in courts.

6.5.3.3 Democracy

Debates on democracy went beyond basic procedures. The Assembly discussed whether India should have a parliamentary or presidential system, how much political participation to allow, and how to protect the Constitution in practice. Despite concerns about widespread illiteracy, the Assembly boldly adopted universal adult suffrage, allowing every adult to vote. It chose a parliamentary system, a strong central government, and an independent judiciary. This combination demonstrated the framers' trust in representative political institutions, supported by checks and balances to prevent the misuse of power.



6.5.4 Federal vs. Unitary Structure and Adoption

6.5.4.1 Federal versus Unitary Structure - the Debate and Settlement

One of the most important debates in the Constituent Assembly was about the relationship between the Centre and the states. Members had to decide whether India should be a federal system, a unitary system, or something in between. Several factors pushed many leaders toward a strong Centre. The colonial government had left behind a highly centralised administrative structure. Additionally, India was a large and diverse country, making coordination difficult without central authority. Above all, the early years of independence involved security threats, communal violence, and the integration of princely states, which made stability a priority. However, there were strong arguments for greater state autonomy. India's linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity meant many groups wanted their own space to govern local affairs. Provincial autonomy had also been a popular demand in nationalist politics. The Assembly eventually chose a middle path. India became a "Union of States", combining federal features with strong unitary elements.

Federal features included two levels of government: Centre and states, a division of powers through Union, State, and Concurrent Lists, and a Rajya Sabha meant to represent the states. Unitary features included residuary powers (powers not listed) assigned to the Centre, strong emergency provisions allowing the Centre to take control during crises, and the ability of the Centre to assume state responsibilities under certain constitutional conditions. Because of this blend, India is often described as

quasi-federal or asymmetrically federal, a system with a federal framework but a strong unitary bias. This structure aimed to maintain national unity while still allowing space for regional diversity and autonomy. Once these institutional arrangements were settled, the Assembly moved to the final stages: the last readings, the signing ceremony, and the formal adoption, which together made the Constitution a functioning, living document.

6.5.4.2 Adoption and Commencement of the Constitution

After going through every clause in detail and voting on many amendments, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution on 26 November 1949. Members then signed it over the next few days. Although it was adopted in November, the Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950. This date was chosen for its symbolic importance, as it marked the anniversary of the 1930 Purna Swaraj (Complete Independence) Declaration. It also allowed time for a smooth transition from British rule to full Republican government.

Between adoption and commencement, some provisions, especially those related to citizenship, elections, and the functioning of Parliament, became effective immediately so that the new institutions could begin to take shape. The transition period involved setting up the key institutions envisioned by the Constitution: an elected President, an elected Parliament, an independent judiciary, and the necessary laws and administrative structures. Successfully adopting the Constitution marked India's shift from colonial constitutional arrangements to a sovereign republican system based on popular sovereignty.



6.5.5 Preamble and Basic Principles

Let us now examine the foundational ideas of the Indian Constitution through the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs). Together, these elements express the goals, values, and vision of India as a democratic nation.

6.5.5.1 The Preamble

The Preamble introduces the Constitution and reflects its philosophy, purpose, and guiding values. It is based on Nehru's Objectives Resolution (1946) and was adopted in 1947. It declares India to be a:

- ◆ Sovereign - independent from any external authority.
- ◆ Socialist - aiming to reduce inequality through a mixed economy.
- ◆ Secular - all religions have equal status.
- ◆ Democratic - power lies with the people through a parliamentary system.
- ◆ Republic - the head of state is elected.

It aims to secure Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity for all citizens. The 42nd Amendment (1976) added the words Socialist, Secular, and Integrity.

6.5.5.2 Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles

During the framing of the Constitution, the Constituent Assembly separated rights into: Fundamental Rights (Part III) - political and civil freedoms that can be enforced in court, and Directive Principles (Part IV) - social and economic goals that guide the State but are not enforceable in court. Fundamental

Rights promote political democracy, while Directive Principles promote social and economic democracy.

Fundamental Rights

Originally seven, now six Fundamental Rights are provided in Articles 12-35:

- ◆ **Right to Equality (Art. 14-18):** Equality before law, non-discrimination, equal opportunity, abolition of untouchability, and titles.
- ◆ **Right to Freedom (Art. 19-22):** Freedom of speech, movement, profession, protection of life and liberty, education (21A), and safeguards against arrest.
- ◆ **Right Against Exploitation (Art. 23-24):** Prohibition of forced labour and child labour.
- ◆ **Right to Freedom of Religion (Art. 25-28):** Freedom of religious practice and management.
- ◆ **Cultural and Educational Rights (Art. 29-30):** Protection of minority languages and education.
- ◆ **Right to Constitutional Remedies (Art. 32):** Right to approach courts for enforcement of Fundamental Rights through writs like Habeas Corpus and Mandamus.
- ◆ **Right to Property** was removed from Fundamental Rights (44th Amendment, 1978) and is now a legal right under Article 300A.

Fundamental Rights have several important features. They are justiciable, meaning citizens can approach the courts if these rights are violated, and they are



protected by the Supreme Court, which acts as their guardian. Although these rights are guaranteed, the State may impose reasonable restrictions on them in the interest of public order, morality, or national security. Furthermore, Fundamental Rights may be suspended during a National Emergency, except for the protections under Articles 20 and 21, which cannot be taken away even in such circumstances.

Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs)

The Directive Principles of State Policy, found in Articles 36–51 and inspired by

the Irish Constitution, are non-justiciable but serve as essential guidelines for the government in creating a just and fair society. They direct the State to promote the welfare of the people, ensure equitable distribution of wealth, provide an adequate livelihood for all citizens, secure equal pay for equal work, and protect workers, children, women, and the elderly or sick. They also guide the State to safeguard the environment, forests, and wildlife, while promoting education, health, and social justice. The essence of these principles is reflected in Article 38, which calls for the establishment of a social order based on social, economic, and political justice.

Recap

- ◆ The Constituent Assembly first met on 9 December 1946 and framed India's Constitution.
- ◆ Members were indirectly elected by provincial legislatures and included diverse political leaders.
- ◆ The Objective Resolution (13 December 1946) provided the philosophical basis for the Constitution.
- ◆ Work was organised through specialist committees; the Drafting Committee was chaired by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.
- ◆ Fundamental Rights were made justiciable and balanced by the Directive Principles of State Policy.
- ◆ Universal adult suffrage was adopted despite limited popular franchise for Assembly elections.
- ◆ Separate electorates were abolished (the Poona Pact led to reserved seats for depressed classes).
- ◆ The Constitution adopted a quasi-federal structure with a strong Centre and emergency provisions.
- ◆ The Constitution was adopted on 26 November 1949 and came into force on 26 January 1950.

Objective Questions

1. On which date did the Constituent Assembly first meet?
2. Who chaired the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly?
3. When was the Constitution of India adopted by the Constituent Assembly?
4. When did the Constitution of India come into force?
5. Which resolution laid down the aims and objectives of the Constituent Assembly?
6. Which document inspired the Directive Principles of State Policy?
7. Which committee was primarily responsible for Fundamental Rights and minority safeguards?
8. What system of government did India adopt?
9. Which Pact helped end the separate electorates for the depressed classes?

Answers

1. 9 December 1946
2. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar
3. 26 November 1949
4. 26 January 1950
5. Objective Resolution (13 December 1946)
6. Irish Constitution
7. Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities (chaired by Sardar Patel)
8. Parliamentary system
9. Poona Pact

Assignments

1. Critically examine the composition and representativeness of the Constituent Assembly. Was the indirect election method justified?
2. Analyse the role of the Drafting Committee in transforming political resolutions into constitutional language; evaluate Dr. Ambedkar's contributions.
3. Debate the choice of quasi-federalism in the Indian Constitution: strengths, weaknesses, and consequences for centre-state relations.
4. Discuss how the Constitution balances individual rights and social justice.

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SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY
Model Question Paper (SET- A)

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name:

SIXTH SEMESTER B.A HISTORY EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE
B21HS07DC - HISTORY OF INDIA-III(MAKING OF INDIAN NATION)
(CBCS - UG)
2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any ten questions of the following. Each question carries one mark.
(10X1 = 10 Marks)

1. What term describes capitalist expansion and domination?
2. In which year Awadh was annexed by Lord Dalhousie?
3. Who is considered as the father of modern India?
4. Which Act laid the foundation of the modern parliamentary form of government in India?
5. In which year the Brahmo Marriage Act was passed?
6. Who was the leader of Lucknow in the revolt of 1857?
7. Which movement aimed to modernise Muslims through Western education?
8. Who laid the intellectual groundwork for extremism through the *New Lamps for Old* essays?
9. Which novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee contains the hymn *Vande Mataram*?
10. Who initiated the Civil Disobedience Movement on 12 March 1930?
11. Which was the first organised trade union in India?
12. Which Act was popularly called the "Black Act"?
13. In which year was the first session of the Indian National Congress organised?
14. Which historian argued that Indian nationalism was a "derivative discourse"?
15. Which land revenue system is considered as the "Modified Zamindari System"?

SECTION B

Answer any ten questions of the following. Each question carries two marks.
(10X2 =20 Marks)

16. What do we understand by the term 'commercialisation of agriculture'?
17. Discuss the role of Nana Saheb in the revolt of 1857.
18. Describe the significance of Queen Victoria's Proclamation.
19. Mention the role of Anusilan Samiti for the growth of militant nationalism in Bengal.
20. What is the significance of the 1907 Surat session of the Indian National Congress.



21. Write a note on *Hind Swaraj*.
22. Discuss the major changes introduced in the Company's administration by the Regulating Act of 1773.
23. How did the policies of Lord Curzon contribute to the growth of nationalist anger in India?
24. What is the significant outcome of the Battle of Plassey.
25. Discuss the features of the Permanent Settlement under the British..
26. Discuss the features of Kol uprising.
27. Describe the annexation Policy of Lord Dalhousie.
28. Explain the major factors identified by Dadabhai Naoroji to illustrate the British mechanism of the Drain Theory.
29. How does the Marxist School of Historiography analyse Indian nationalism through the lens of class struggle and economic development during the colonial period?
30. Discuss the "safety valve theory" regarding the formation of the Indian National Congress.

SECTION C

Write a short note on any five questions of the following. Each question carries four marks. **(5X4 = 20 Marks)**

31. Subsidiary Alliance Treaty.
32. Ryotwari System.
33. The Communal Award.
34. Jotiba Phule.
35. Gandhi-Irwin Pact.
36. All India Trade Union Congress.
37. Indian National Army.
38. The Mountbatten Plan.
39. Chauri Chaura incident.
40. Drain of wealth.

SECTION D

Answer any two questions of the following. Each question carries ten marks. **(2X10 =20 Marks)**

41. Examine the nature and character of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Was it merely a sepoy mutiny or the first war of Indian independence?
42. Examine the objectives, methods, and impact of Swadeshi movement in Indian society.
43. Analyse how regional literature and arts contributed to the rise of nationalism and cultural awakening in 19th-century India.
44. Examine how the Non-Cooperation Movement spread across India and what were the factors that contributed to its rapid expansion.



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY
Model Question Paper (SET- B)

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name:

SIXTH SEMESTER B.A HISTORY EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE COURSE
B21HS07DC - HISTORY OF INDIA-III (MAKING OF INDIAN MEDIEVAL SOCIETIES
(CBCS - UG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **one** mark.*

(10X1 = 10 Marks)

1. Which Act created the post of Governor-General of Bengal?
2. Who described the drain of wealth as the “radicalising force” of nationalist thought?
3. Name the revenue system introduced mainly in Tamil Nadu and later extended to parts of Maharashtra, Punjab, Assam, Coorg, and other regions.
4. Who was the author of the work *Anand Math*?
5. Who was the propounder of Drain Theory?
6. Who described the revolt of 1857 as the “Indian War of Independence,”?
7. Which book written by Phule criticised caste oppression?
8. Who energised extremism in Maharashtra between 1905 and 1908 through *Kesari* and *Swadeshi* activities?
9. Which party issued the *Ailan-e-Jung* (Proclamation of War)?
10. Who criticised the Indian National Congress as a “microscopic minority”?
11. Who was the author of the novel *Sarasvatichandra*?
12. Who led the *Khudai Khidmatgars* movement?
13. In which year was the Gandhi–Irwin Pact signed?
14. Who declared 16 August 1946 as Direct Action Day?
15. Which act transferred the administration of India to the British Crown?

SECTION B

*Answer any **ten** questions of the following. Each question carries **two** marks.*

(10X2 =20 Marks)

16. What is Dual Government?
17. Explain the features of Doctrine of Lapse.
18. What do you understand about the term ‘Deindustrialisation’.
19. What is the significance of the Sanyasi Rebellion (1763–1800)?
20. Discuss the significance of the Brahmo Marriage Act of 1872.



21. Discuss the objectives of Indian National Congress.
22. Write a note on Simla Conference, 1945.
23. What is the meaning of the term 'Satyagraha'.
24. Write a note on the role of Madras Labour Union in the Indian labour movement.
25. Discuss the aims of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC).
26. Discuss the significance of Asiatic Registration Act ("Black Act").
27. Write a note on the Meerut Conspiracy Case.
28. Discuss the objectives of the Theosophical Society..
29. What are the causes for the rise of militant nationalism in India?.
30. How did Dadabhai Naoroji criticise British rule over India?

SECTION C

*Write a short note on any **five** questions of the following. Each question carries **four** marks.*

(5X4 = 20 Marks)

31. Regulating Act 1773.
32. Cripps Mission?
33. The Drain of Wealth Theory.
34. Swadeshi Movement.
35. Komagata Maru Incident.
36. Lucknow Pact.
37. The Chauri Chaura Incident?
38. Round Table Conferences (1930–1932)
39. Ideology and Programmes of the Congress Socialist Party.
40. Kisan Sabha Movement

SECTION D

*Answer any **two** questions of the following. Each question carries **ten** marks.*

(2X10 =20 Marks)

41. Discuss the major causes that led to the outbreak of the Indian Rebellion of 1857
42. Explain the major land revenue systems introduced by the British East India Company in India and analyse their impact on the agrarian economy?
43. Examine the main provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935.
44. Discuss the reasons for the rise of Radical Nationalism in India.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
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ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുതിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

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ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
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ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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**DON'T LET IT
BE TOO LATE**

**SAY
NO
TO
DRUGS**

**LOVE YOURSELF
AND ALWAYS BE
HEALTHY**



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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

History of India -III (Making of Indian Nation)

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