**India 1900 to 1947**

In 1900, India was part of the British Empire; but by the end of 1947, India had achieved independence.

For most of the Nineteenth Century, India was ruled by the British. India was considered the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. Queen Victoria had been made Empress of India and the British had a major military presence in India.

Indian nationals had no say in central government and even at a local level; their influence on policy and decision making was minimal.

In 1885, educated middle-class nationals had founded the**Indian National Congress**(INC). They aimed to get a much greater say in the way India was governed.

In response to this development, the **Morley-Minto** reforms were introduced in 1909. Morley was the Secretary of State for India and Lord Morley was Viceroy of India. Their reforms lead to each province in India having its governor and Indian nationals were allowed to sit on the councils which advised these governors.

After 1918, nationalism within India intensified. This was probably due to 2 reasons:

1. Many educated nationals in India were far from satisfied with the Morley-Minto reforms. White Englishmen still dominated India and there had been no real decrease in their power or increase in national power. The INC (Indian National Council) wanted a lot more.

2. Woodrow Wilson had stimulated the minds of many people with his belief in national self-determination – i.e. that people from a country had a right to govern themselves. The whole concept of national self-determination undermined the basic idea of the British Empire – that the British governed this empire (or people appointed by the British to do the same). For national self-determination to fully work, India would have to be governed by the Indians living there.

As early as 1917, Britain had toyed with the idea of giving India a measure of self-government: “the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire”.

In 1919, the Government of India Act was introduced.

This introduced a national parliament with two houses for India.  
About 5 million of the wealthiest Indians were given the right to vote (a very small percentage of the total population)  
Within the provincial governments, ministers of education, health and public works could now be Indian nationals. A commission would be held in 1929, to see if India was ready for more concessions/reforms.

However, the British controlled all central government and within the provincial governments, the British kept control of the key posts of tax and law and order.

Many Tory MP’s in Britain were against the whole idea of giving anything whatsoever to India in terms of self-government. They had two complaints about the whole idea:

1. If you gave India some form of self-rule, where would it end?

2. Would it start the process that would lead to the break-up of the British Empire?

The reforms were introduced very slowly and their spread throughout such a large country was equally as slow. This angered many as there was a general belief that the British were deliberately stalling on introducing these reforms to ensure their continued supremacy in India.

Riots did break out and the most infamous was at **Amritsar** in the Punjab where 379 unarmed protesters were shot dead by British soldiers based there. 1200 were injured. This incident shocked many in India but what caused equal outrage was the British reaction to Amritsar – the officer commanding British troops at Amritsar, General Dyer, was simply allowed to resign his commission after an inquiry criticised his leadership during the riot. Many national Indians felt that he, and others in the army, had got away very lightly. The more radical Indians felt that the British government had all but sanctioned murder.

As a result of Amritsar, many Indians rushed to join the INC and it very quickly became the party of the masses.

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| **“After Amritsar, no matter what compromises and concessions the British might suggest, British rule would ultimately be swept away.”** |

The most vocal opponent of the idea of some form of self-rule for India was Lord Birkenhead whole was Secretary of State for India from 1924 to 1928. With such an opponent, any move to self-rule was very difficult at best, and probably impossible in reality.

In India, the 1920’s saw the emergence of three men who were to have a huge impact on the future of India:

[**Jawaharlal Nehru**](https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/india-1900-to-1947/jawaharlal-nehru/)

[**Mahatma Gandhi**](https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/india-1900-to-1947/mahatma-gandhi/)

[**Muhammed Jinnah**](https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/india-1900-to-1947/muhammed-jinnah/)

Gandhi persuaded many of his followers to use non-violent protests. They had sit-down strikes, they refused to work, they refused to pay their taxes etc. If the British reacted in a heavy-handed manner, it only made the British look worse; essentially, the British would come across as bullies enforcing their rule on the bullied. However, there were those in India who wanted to use more extreme measures.

Part of the 1919 Government of India Act stated that a commission would be established after 10 years to assess whether India could/should have more self-rule. This first met in 1928 – the **Simon Commission.**

This commission reported in 1930. There were no Indians on the commission. It proposed self-government for the provinces but nothing else. This was unacceptable for the INC, which wanted dominion status, granted immediately.

During the time the Simon Commission reported, Gandhi started his second civil disobedience campaign. This included Gandhi deliberately breaking the law. The law in India stated that only the government could manufacture salt. After a 250-mile march to the sea, Gandhi started to produce his own salt. This produced a violent clash with the British authorities and Gandhi was arrested.

At this time, a sympathetic Viceroy to India had been appointed – Lord Irwin. He believed that India should have dominion status – and he publicly expressed this idea. Irwin pushed for the issue to be discussed. He organised two Round Table conferences in 1930 and 1931. They were both held in London.

The first conference failed as no INC members were present. Most were in Indian prisons. Irwin pushed for their release and he persuaded Gandhi to travel to Britain to take part in the second conference. Despite this development, the conference achieved little as it broke down over an issue that was to haunt India in future years – religion. Those present at the second conference, argued and failed to agree over what the representation of Muslims would be in an independent Indian parliament.

In 1935, the **Government of India Act** was introduced. Britain, at this time, had a National Government and progress was made over India purely because Stanley Baldwin, the Tory leader, and Ramsey-MacDonald, the Labour leader, agreed on a joint course of action. Winston Churchill was bitterly opposed to it.

The Act introduced:

An elected Indian assembly to have a say in everything in India except defence and foreign affairs.The eleven provincial assemblies were to have effective full control over local affairs.

The nationalists in India were not satisfied with this as the act did not introduce dominion status and white dominions were allowed to control their own defence and foreign policies. Also, the princes who still ruled areas of India still refused to co-operate with the provincial assemblies so the second strand of the Act would have been meaningless.

The act’s major failing was that it ignored the religious rivalry between the Muslims and Hindus. Nearly two-thirds of India’s population were Hindus and the Muslims feared that in an independent and democratic India they would be treated unfairly. In the 1937 provincial elections, the Hindus, who dominated the Congress Party under Nehru, won eight out of the eleven provinces. The Muslim League under Jinnah demanded a separate state of their own to be called Pakistan. Both Gandhi and the Congress Party were determined to preserve Indian unity. Such a rivalry between the Hindus and Muslims could only bode ill for the future of India.

[World War Two](https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/index.htm) shelved the Indian issue – albeit temporarily. The Indians provided valuable military help in the fight against Japan especially in the campaign in Burma. The British promised dominion status for India once the war had ended.

In 1945, the newly elected Labour government headed by Clement Attlee wanted to push ahead with solving what was seen as the “Indian Problem”. However, the religious rivalry in India was coming to a head and made any potential solution very complex. Attempts to draw up a compromise constitution that was acceptable to both Muslims and Hindus failed. The British plan was to allow the provincial governments extensive powers whilst central government would only have limited powers. The Labour government put its faith in the hope that most Muslims lived in one or two provinces and that the governments in these provinces would reflect this in their decision making. If this plan worked, the need for a separate Muslim state would not be needed. The plan was accepted in principle but the details for it were not.

The Governor-General of India, Lord Wavell, invited Nehru to form an interim government in August 1946. Wavell hoped that the details of such a government could be sorted out later – but he hoped that the creation of an actual government headed by Indian nationals would be supported by all. The Hindu Nehru included two Muslims in his cabinet but this did not succeed in stopping violence. Jinnah became convinced that Nehru could not be trusted and he called on Muslims to take “direct action” to get an independent Muslim state. Violence spread and over 5000 people were killed in Calcutta. India descended into civil war.

Early in 1947, Atlee announced that Britain would leave India no later than June 1948. A new Viceroy was appointed – Lord Mountbatten – and he concluded that peace could only be achieved if partition was introduced. The Hindu Congress agreed with him. Mountbatten became convinced that any delay would increase violence and he pushed forward the date for Britain leaving India to August 1947.

In August 1947, the **Indian Independence Act**was signed. This separated the Muslim majority areas (in the north-west and north-east regions of India) from India to create the independent state of Pakistan. This new state was split in two, the two parts being 1000 miles apart. The act was not easy to put into action.

Some people found themselves on the wrong side of frontiers especially in the mixed provinces of the Punjab and Bengal. Millions moved to the new frontiers – Hindus in what was to be the new Pakistan moved to India while Muslims in India moved to Pakistan. Where the two moving groups met, violence occurred especially in the volatile Punjab province where it is through 250,000 people were murdered in religious clashes. By the end of 1947, it seemed as if the violence was on the wane but in January 1948, a Hindu assassinated Gandhi. In a gesture that summed up the whole problem of India, the Hindu detested Gandhi’s tolerance towards Muslims. However, the murder of Gandhi shocked so many people, that ironically it ushered in a period of stability.