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# Book Reports

*Non Fiction Chapter Summaries*

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# India's struggle for independence: 1857-1947

## Introduction

- Book Citation : Bipan Chandra et al., 2016.
- India's struggle for independence was unique in its non-violent nature, the robust internal democracy within the Congress movement (as it was called before independence), its commitment to secularism and a strongly anti-imperialist foreign policy.
- Cambridge School of historians (imperialist) deny fundamentally the existence of colonialism in British India and the contradiction of between the interests of the Indian subjects and their British rulers.
- This school believes that caste, religion and region-based politics are the reality and that any nationalist sentiment is a mere cover.
- It also refuses to believe that all the lives sacrificed in the freedom movement were motivated by any idealism.
- Nationalist school of historiography completely ignores the class, caste and ideological struggles for hegemony within the national freedom movement.
- Marxist School, which believes that the movement was led by and belonged to the bourgeoisie primarily, and ignores the all-class nature of the struggle.
- A clear anti-colonial ideology and a critique of colonialism evolved at the very beginning of the freedom movement among the Indian intelligentsia.
- The making of a national identity was never considered at odds with the religious, regional, linguistic and cultural diversity of the Indian colony.
- British rule was not benevolent and not invincible. These were the primary ideas which needed to be disseminated to break the British cultural hegemony within the subcontinent.
- Communalist forces did not get eradicated completely by the national movement. Also it could not bring about a full cultural revolution in terms



Bahadur Shah Zafar I

of advancing the social status of women, Harijans, the landless poor and other disadvantaged groups.

- Hegemony is means the way a ruling class organizes consent among the ruled and exercised moral authority over them. It does not refer to direct use of force in order to express dominance.

## 1 The First Major Challenge: The Revolt of 1857

- Bahadur Shah II was coerced into declaring himself the face of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, which started in Meerut and marched to Delhi
- Since the revolt lacked any organized leadership, local aristocrats and princelings were often the impromptu administrators and leaders of the insurgency
- Serving in the British Army conflicted with the sepoys' caste and religious sentiments, especially when deploying overseas
- In most places, civil rebellion accompanied the sepoys' mutiny with violent destruction of government property
- Increasing economic oppression and draconian land revenue policies also played a role in angering the soldiers
- Indian traders, intelligentsia, and royalty did not support the rebels, and sometimes actively supported the Raj



Bahadur Shah Zafar II

## 2 Civil Rebellions and Tribal Uprisings

- Deposed kings and minor princelings often led peasant rebellions in the first 100 years of the Raj
- Much greater pressure on the peasants due to increased land revenue collection by the British compared to the Mughals led to discontent
- Every class in society lost either their wealth, livelihood, patronage or political power with the advent of the Raj in the late 18th century
- These early rebellions were fuelled by local causes and confined to a small geographical spread, completely isolated from each other
- Tribals were brought fully into the colonial land-revenue system and denied their semi-isolated lifestyle dependent on the forest for food, cattle-feed and fuel



Bahadur Shah Zafar III

- They were entrapped in debt and unpaid agricultural labor contracts as a result of colonization
- Santhal rebellion near Bhagalpur, Kol rebellion in Chhotanagpur, and the Munda rebellion led by Birsa Munda were the three biggest tribal uprisings
- Tribal leaders would often proclaim to have received a commandment from God to raise arms against the oppressive outsiders which would be a powerful rallying cry to motivate their tribesmen

### 3 Peasant Movements and Uprisings after 1857

- Indigo planters in Bengal province forced fraudulent contracts on their peasants, often offering them less than fair prices. They also resorted to the use of brute force to compel the peasants to accept these unfavourable working conditions
- Indigo cultivation was successfully wiped out from Bengal by 1860 through the peasants' use of legal resistance, armed insurrection and social boycott
- Intelligentsia played a key role in the Indigo protests by collecting and disseminating information about the state of the rebellion throughout the province using the printing press
- In legal disputes between the peasants and the zamindars, the Raj took a neutral stance, with help being given to the landowners only on the rare occasion when violence broke out
- Cotton farmers in Maharashtra also revolted against the moneylenders and landowners
- Peasant revolts in the 1870s were also prevalent in the Malabar and in Punjab and Assam
- After 1857, the revolts started to ignore local princes and leaders in favour of being organized entirely by peasants
- These protests sought to bring back the old world order, and get rid of the excessive pressure on their land revenue from the British Raj. They did not seek to establish a new world order, or to upend the existing social hierarchy
- Peasant movements were not anti-imperialist and had no issue with the colonial power structure itself. They were merely protesting against the unjust revenue collection and illegal behaviour of their landowners

## 4 Foundation of the Congress: The Myth

- An extremely prevalent myth is that the INC was founded in 1885 as a safety valve for the rising anger under the full supervision and approval of the Raj
- The extreme left and extreme right found it convenient to use this myth to attack the non-violence and the secularism of the INC respectively
- A.O.Hume, the source of this myth, had corresponded with the Viceroy of the time, talking about his interactions with omniscient godmen residing in Tibet and their role in quelling the earlier rebellions in India
- Extensive written records of communication between Viceroy Dufferin, the Governor of Bombay and A.O.Hume prove that the INC was birthed as a political body and that the Raj did not approve of its existence in the slightest

## 5 Foundation of The Indian National Congress: The Reality

- Indians had been making less extreme demands for financial relief, military and administrative reform and the election of more sympathetic leaders in British elections even before 1885, when the INC was formally founded
- Promoting national unity and the idea of India as a nation within the popular consciousness was a major INC objective
- Politics of popular participation and mobilization was completely new to India, which had only lived under monarchy for many centuries
- Even though the early INC leaders did not organize any mass movements, their role in understanding the nature and purpose of the colonial system and the evolution of a pan-Indian national identity is still a valued contribution to winning India's freedom
- A leadership group or headquarters for the national movement was also necessary. This role was to be fulfilled by the INC using its parliamentary system of decision making during regular sessions held all over the country
- Suppression of the INC in its early days was sidestepped by having a distinguished retired ICS man (A.O. Hume) be the chief organizer



## 6 Socio-Religious Reforms and the National Awakening

- Political action required social reform which in turn required religious reform, if only from the utilitarian point of view of making the Indian masses more capable of mass political action
- Religious reformers of the time were motivated by rationalism and a rejection of the immutability of religious scripture
- Priests had a monopoly on communing with the Gods, and on dictating almost every aspect of a layman's life. The reformers sought to break this stranglehold and democratize the practise of religion
- Reformers also sought to use the natural instinct to oppose the imposition of colonial cultural values towards the awakening of a greater political consciousness among the people

## 7 An Economic Critique of Colonialism

- Dadhabai Naoroji, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and Romesh Chandra Dutt were the three early Moderates who solidified an economic critique of colonialism after they observed the failure of the Raj to bring about modernization in India
- They established the link between the economic regression of the subcontinent and the man-made colonial causes. This was not a natural or fated phenomenon
- They argued that Indian capital and not foreign capital would have to seed the industrialization of the nation, and this would be the path to economic and social progress
- An increase in the volume of foreign trade in the 19th century was not a sign of progress because of the nature of the trade, which involved the export of raw material and the import of manufactured goods
- British economic policy was guided solely by the interests of the British capitalists, and not by any desire to nurture industry in India
- Drain theory, once disseminated among the masses, got rid of the belief in the Raj providing good results and having good intentions for the Indian people. This shook the moral foundations of colonialism in the minds of the public

## 8 The Fight to Secure Press Freedom

- Section 124A of the IPC (the sedition law) restricted the freedom of the Press by criminalising the circulation of printed material that spread disaffection or discontent among the people
- Newspapers were the most effective means of political education, even among the illiterate masses who would listen to the material being read aloud
- Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the first prominent journalist to be prosecuted for sedition. His trial and imprisonment made him a well-known figure in the national consciousness
- Lokmanya Tilak's second trial for sedition and the six-year sentence in Burma to be served starting 1908 was to foreshadow Gandhiji being prosecuted under the same sedition laws in 1922
- Tilak plead not guilty to the charges of sedition, unlike Gandhi, reflecting the nascent nature of the Swarajya movement and the unwillingness to be openly defiant to the Raj

## 9 Propaganda in the Legislatures

- Imperial Legislative Councils were bodies with no real power meant to incorporate some Indian members so that the British could be made aware of Indian discontent in the aftermath of the 1857 revolt
- In practice, most Indian members appointed to the ILCs were princelings, wealthy merchants or other stooges who towed the British line
- Demands for a model of self-government based on the colonies of Canada and Australia where the people elected their representatives into positions of economic and political decision-making began to gather steam in the 1900s
- G. K. Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta were the two most prominent members of the Legislative Councils who debated and critiqued legislation passed by the Raj and used their positions in the ILCs to further their status as leaders of the freedom movement

## 10 The Swadeshi Movement - 1903-1908

- Anti-partition sentiment against the proposed partitioning of Bengal province into a Muslim-majority eastern portion and a Bengali-minority western portion sowed the seeds of the larger Swadeshi movement in 1900-1910

- In 1906, Dadhabai Naoroji took the important step of declaring formally that Swaraj was the chief objective of the INC and the Swadeshi and Boycott movements had now grown larger than a mere anti-partition agitation
- Festivals, processions, meetings, and other new forms of mass mobilization and political education began to be used starting with the Swadeshi movement
- All India Muslim League was set up under the guidance of the Raj specifically to weaken the Swadeshi movement and introduce a communal obstacle to the efforts of the INC to unite all Indians under their banner
- Moderate forms of protest, such as petitioning and legal argument took a back seat during the Swadesh and Boycott movements, which were led by the extremist wing of the INC. The movements ended with the deportation or arrest of almost all of its leaders, and because it was impossible for mass mobilization to remain active for prolonged periods of time.

## **11 The Split in the Congress and the Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism**

- A policy of divide and rule was applied to the Extremist (led by Tilak) and Moderate (led by Gokhale) wings of the INC by then Viceroy Lord Minto once it became clear that it was not merely an academic body consisting of a few western-educated elite thinkers, but an organization capable of sustaining mass agitation as evidenced by the Swadeshi and Boycott movements
- Surat, 1907 was the Congress session that saw the resentment between the two wings of the party break out in violence with the police having to clear the premises. The Extremist wing's leadership either retired or emigrated or were exiled in the aftermath.
- Morley-Minto reforms included the introduction of Muslim constituencies to introduce a communal flavour to Indian political representation in the ILCs. Although the ILCs had more indirectly elected Indian members, they still lacked any real power
- 1908-1918 saw a period of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal which aimed to use violence and assassination of key officials as a means of 'protest by action'

## **12 World War I and Indian Nationalism: The Ghadar**

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## 13 The Home Rule Movement and Its Fallout

- Lokmanya Tilak, after serving his long sentence in Burma, planned to start the Home Rule League with Annie Beasant (who was working in Madras at the time) after failing to gain readmission into the Congress
- Tilak's Home Rule Leagues operated in Maharashtra, Karnataka and the surrounding regions, while Mrs. Beasant's Leagues were responsible for operation in the rest of the country
- Annie Beasant's arrest in 1917 led to the Home Rule movement gaining a popularity boost, with calls for civil disobedience and passive resistance starting to be heard
- The new Secretary of State Montague (who succeeded Lord Morley) sought to take a more pacifist stance with the Indians and instituted a policy of granting the Indians some kind of self-governance in the long run

## 14 Gandhiji's Early Career and Activism

- Gandhi's work in South Africa against the overtly racist apartheid regime was to last only a few months in 1893, but happened to stretch twenty years
- Having exhausted the 'Moderate' methods of struggle, such as petitions, civil suits and other legal means by 1906, Gandhi then decided to turn to civil disobedience and Satyagraha
- By 1913, Gandhi had managed to get the Governor General of South Africa and the Viceroy of India to agree to most of his demands
- Gandhi's first political action was to emancipate the Indigo plantation workers in Champaran from their unfair contracts by debuting his methods of passive resistance and refusing the external order imposed by the Raj
- Gandhi also arbitrated a wage hike dispute between mill owners and workers in Ahmedabad and as well as a land-revenue dispute in Kheda
- Protests against the Rowlatt Bills, meant to curtail freedoms in the name of maintaining order, inspired Gandhi to declare a nationwide Satyagraha, which would take the form of a non-violent strike
- Violence broke out in many parts of India however, and led tragically to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar

## 15 The Non-Cooperation Movement - 1920-22

- Britain violating many of the promises it had made before the end of the First World War, and the toothless reforms they did bother proposing, led to a rapid rise in resentment and discontent among the Indians by mid 1920
- Non-cooperation was to include the boycott of government institutions, foreign goods, and striking,
- Violence against policemen in Chauri-Chaura, UP which led directly to Gandhi withdrawing the Non-Cooperation Movement in early 1922
- Gandhi withdrew the movement for other secondary reasons, including an ebb in the general nationalist vigour across the masses and concerns about the possibility of communalism creeping into the movement

## 16 Peasant Movements and Nationalism in the 1920s

- Avadh in UP saw organized agricultural labour movements through the *Kisan Sabha* and separately the *Eka* struggles. Both of these movements were swiftly ended by the Raj through violent prosecution and repression
- In 1921, the Mappila Muslim tenants in the Malabar region rebelled against unfair land revenue policies.
- This rebellion only acquire a communal colour after the Raj began its violent repression along with its recruitment of local Hindu landowners to its cause against the Mappilas
- Bardoli, Gujarat was the site of the earlier satyagraha which Gandhi had canceled after the violence at Chauri Chaura, U.P.
- This was where the next big peasant movement began under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel in early 1928
- Eventually, the Raj was forced to revise its land revenue rates and concede to the demands of the Bardoli movement

## 17 The Indian Working Class and the National Movement

- Collective bargaining and class action among the labour class in India had been deliberately ignored by the INC prior to the 1920s

- AITUC was the first national workers' body to be created in the 1920s
- Textile, railway and steelworking were the major industries at the time which employed the largest number of workers and thus contributed the most to union membership
- CPI, which had seceded from the nationalist movement in the late 1920s, re-entered it in the 1930s
- Hitler's invasion of Russia led to the CPI withdrawing from the Quit India Movement of 1942, since the fatherland had to now be defended from the fascists Nazis

## 18 The Struggles for Gurdwara Reform and Temple Entry

- Gurdwaras in Punjab were under the control of a priestly class until the 1920s, who were funneling all of the temple revenue into their own pockets
- These priests were used very effectively by the Raj to subjugate the people of Punjab through their stranglehold on the religion
- SAD was founded in December 1920 to organize both the political struggle of the Sikhs as well as to manage the network of Gurdwaras that the reformers had successfully managed to liberate from the control of the priests
- By 1925, the Raj was forced to placate the Akali movement by conceding to the demands of its moderate wing and handing over complete control of all Sikh religious institutions to a body of elected Sikh leaders
- INC had chosen not to pursue social or religious reform till the 1920s, out of a fear of sowing divisions within the freedom movement
- It chose to reverse this position in 1923, and started a campaign to abolish untouchability, spearheaded by Gandhi
- Vaikom village in Travancore district, Kerala was the site of the first major satyagraha and harijan temple entry protest
- In 1936, the Maharaja of Travancore proclaimed entry into temples free for all people including harijans. Other provinces quickly followed suit, showing the amount of national attention this movement had garnered

## **19 The Years of Stagnation - Swarajists, No-changers and Gandhiji**

- Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, split from the INC in 1928 to form the Swaraj Party, with their single issue being a cessation of boycotts and re-entering the election process to have their voices heard in the Legislative Councils
- This split however was not as emphatic as that of 1907, and compromises between the two camps were quickly reached out of a need to maintain a united front and a respect for Gandhi's decision being the final word in the matter
- Swarajists won a majority of the seats in the provincial and central Legislative Councils in the 1923 elections, either on their own or in coalition with local groups. Once inside, they voted out every piece of legislation put forth by the British, forcing them to be ratified by the Viceroy
- This became a major source of humiliation for the Raj and its illusion of having the goodwill of its subjects began to show cracks
- After a significantly worse showing in the 1926 elections due to rising communalism and the compulsions of coalition politics, the Swaraj Party slowly ended its participation in the Legislative Councils by 1930

## **20 Bhagat Singh, Surya Sen and the Revolutionary Terrorists**

- Violent revolution in Northern India started with the HRA in 1924
- Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad and Rajguru assassinated a police official in 1928 to avenge the killing of Lala Lajpat Rai in an earlier lathi charge incident
- They were tried and hanged in 1931, along with many of their fellow revolutionaries, in a series of highly publicized court trials
- Revolutionary activity was also organized on a large scale in Bengal province, by the IRA, especially in and around Chittagong
- By 1929, Bhagat Singh had abandoned his belief in violent revolution by the individual in favour of a Marxist mass movement as the most effective path to liberation
- Socialism, anti-communalism and atheism were the primary messages contained in Bhagat Singh and the revolutionaries' messaging to the masses

## 21 The Gathering Storm 1927-1929

- Simon Commission was an all-white commission appointed in 1927 to look into the Indians' demands for further constitutional independence
- Boycotts and protests against the Simon commission (popularizing the "Simon Go Back" slogan) led to police repression that killed Lala Lajpat Rai in Lahore
- Lahore, 1929 was the INC session in which Jawaharlal Nehru, as the President, famously declared *Purna Swaraj* as the only end goal of the Indian struggle against the Raj
- Gandhi regarded this session as the transfer of power and leadership from the older generation to the young, and insisted on appointing Nehru president over the objections of a majority of provincial Congress committees
- On January 26 1930, the Pledge of Independence was read all over the country to mark the start of the year of active protest

## 22 Civil Disobedience 1930-1931

- On 6 April 1930, Gandhi inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement after marching to Dandi and picking up some salt from the beach in violation of the Salt tax laws
- Secondary forms of satyagraha called for non-payment of taxes and the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor
- On 25 January 1931, following a Round Table Conference in London attended by Indian representatives to discuss the constitutional future of India, Gandhi was released from jail
- Negotiations between the Viceroy Lord Irwin and Gandhi led to a truce in March 1931 called the Gandhi-Irwin pact
- Although the pact is seen as capitulation by Gandhi to bourgeoisie interests or as a betrayal, it can be understood as a recognition of the satyagraha losing steam and a timely extraction of as many concessions as possible from the Raj

## 23 From Karachi to Wardha: The Years from 1932-1934

- In March 1931, the INC passed the Karachi resolution which was to constitute the essence of the constitution of independent India and guide Congress policy in later decades



- After signing the Gandhi-Irwin pact, the British government decided to reverse their policy of negotiating with the INC on equal terms and went back on their earlier promises
- In the years 1931-1934, the Raj crushed all attempts at mass organization, censored any reporting by the press on the freedom movement, and established Civil Martial Law
- Gandhi undertook an extensive travel campaign and multiple fasts to put an end to untouchability and liberate the untouchable castes, whom he called Harijans
- This movement was not to intersect with Ambedkar's demands for the abolition of the caste system itself. Tackling inter-marriage and inter-dining among the castes was not in Gandhi's interests during this time

## 24 The Rise of the Left-Wing

- Socialism and Marxist ideology acquired a foothold in Indian politics in the 1920s and 1930s through the formation of the CPI, the CSP and in the rise to prominence of Nehru within the INC
- Nehru, while criticizing Gandhi in 1933 for his belief in the harmony between classes and rejection of the Marxist class perspective, also defended his contribution to the freedom movement in raising the political consciousness of the masses
- After the Congress of the Communist International session 1935 held in Moscow, the Communists were to cooperate with other socialist and anti-imperialist forces to face the coming threat of fascism
- This led to the CPI, which had alienated itself from the mainstream of the freedom movement by splitting from the INC, reintegrating itself into the main party
- The CSP was founded jointly by Jayaprakash Narayan and associates in 1934 with the objective of working under the INC umbrella with the aim of steering it leftward and compelling it to adopt a socialist program

## 25 The Strategic Debate 1934-1937

- Nehru wished to take up the socialist path forward in the lull following the end of the Non-cooperation movement in 1934.
- Existing camps wanted to either follow Gandhi in reconstructive work in the villages or the Swarajists in participating in the Legislative Assemblies and contesting elections

- British strategy involved following up the open repression with a phase of reforms and eyewash legislation designed to wean the moderate and constitutionalist section of the INC away from the mainstream freedom movement
- In 1935, the Government of India Act was designed to create a shambling provincial body that was supposedly autonomous and had legislative powers. In truth, the governors and viceroy still had direct control over sensitive subjects and exercised extensive veto powers behind the scenes
- In 1937, elections to the ILC and the Provincial Legislative Assemblies were contested by the Congress with an agenda wholly rejecting the 1935 Act, and the broad themes of the freedom movement
- Their performance in the elections helped Nehru come to terms with the fallacy of an uninterrupted struggle and see the light in Gandhi's ebb and flow strategy of non-cooperation

## 26 Twenty-eight Months of Congress Rule

- In the provinces where it assumed office, the Congress immediately set about repealing curbs on press freedom, releasing political prisoners, restoring whatever civil liberties they could
- Attempts to reform the land revenue system and abolish the zamindari practice were hampered by the limits placed on the INC's powers by the Governors and the viceroy
- Also the multi-class nature of the freedom movement meant that the INC could not wholly antagonize the landlord class in its attempts to make reparations for the peasant classes
- INC Ministries promoted tenancy reform, pro-labour reforms targeting the industrial sector, and social reforms aimed at Harijan upliftment
- Left wing groups within the INC were dissatisfied with its handling of extra-legal protests and its dilemma in nurturing the freedom movement while also being the government in power
- Breaking one of the other myths propping up the Raj, that Indians were not fit to rule themselves, was the major accomplishment of the Ministries

## 27 Peasant Movements in the 1930s and '40s

- Pressure from the Great Depression starting in 1929 and the Non-cooperation movement in the 1930s led to mass organization among the peasants starting with the formation of the AIKSC in 1936 at Lucknow

- Agrarian legislation, motivated by the first Kisan Manifesto of 1937, was pushed for by the Congress Ministries during their 28 month term in power
- Anti-war sentiments held by the Kisan Sabhas and other Socialist sections of the Congress attracted severe repression from the Raj with the onset of World War II
- Major leaders left the Kisan Sahbha Congress because of the pro-War anti-fascist party line enforced by the Communist flank
- In 1945, the end of WWII meant the resumption of the struggle to abolish zamindari, which found success post-independence in Bengal and Punjab

## 28 The Freedom Struggle in Princely India

- Praja mandals began to form in many princely states in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920
- By 1939, the Government of India Act and the 28 month tenure of the Congress Ministries in British India accelerated political mobilization and awareness among the people of the princely states
- In 1939, the AISPC elected Nehru their president, formally merging the two organizations and tearing down the barrier that the INC had previously maintained between the freedom movements in British and princely India
- For 30 years, the princely state of Rajkot was ruled by Lakhajiraj, a progressive monarch who placed great value in the development of industry, and established a legislative body full of elected representatives of the people
- His successor, Dharmendra Singhji, was the polar opposite and indulged in hedonism to the point of squandering away
- Satyagraha punctuated by brief but unsuccessful negotiations with the British resident in Rajkot, along with the Dewan, who was the real center of royal power, culminated in Gandhi arriving in Rajkot and beginning a fast unto death in March 1939
- In Hyderabad, the Nizam sought to impose Islam and Urdu in an otherwise majority Hindu state, along with repressing any efforts to promote the other languages of the realm (Marathi, Kannada and Telugu)
- Although the State Congress (a body unrelated to the INC but receiving its support) withdrew its agitations for fear of being subsumed by the communal agitations of the Arya samaj in the late 1930s, the Quit India movement of 1942 brought together formally the subjects of the Raj and the princely states in their demand for a free India
- After Viceroy Mountbatten announced 15th August 1947 as the date the Raj would hand over power to the Indians and would no longer have dominion over the princely states, the Nizam decided to refuse accession to the union

- From 7th August 1947, the Nizam used armed paramilitary forces to repress the protestors and quell strikes. On 18th September 1948, when the Indian Union moved its army into Hyderabad, the Nizam finally surrendered and acceded to the Union
- Unlike Hyderabad, the rulers of most other states realized the extent to which they were propped up by the British government in spite of its claims of non-interference. This led to them readily signing the Instruments of Accession once the British left India

## 29 Indian Capitalists and the National Movement

- Capitalists under the Raj grew in spite of colonialism, not because of it, as is often the case in other colonies. They insisted on the use of independent capital, import substitution strategies and a refusal to be subservient to the Raj.
- In 1927, the FICCI was the first all-India lobbying organization founded by the capitalist class to agitate for its interests
- Non-constitutional forms of struggle, such as satyagraha were regarded with skepticism by the capitalists for fear that they would attract a social revolution, and threaten the idea of capitalism itself
- While capitalists did donate to the INC, these funds were far from the primary means of sustenance for the party and the freedom movement. Such contributions did not lead to any influencing of INC policy or softening of their anti-imperialist stance

## 30 The Development of a Nationalist Foreign Policy

- In the 1870s and 1880s, the Indian army was used to wage wars in Afghanistan and Egypt to further the imperial interests of Britain, at the expense of Indian wealth and manpower
- Leaders of the Indian freedom movement expressed their sympathy and support for anti-imperialist struggle in many countries in Asia and Africa from the 1870s to the 1940s
- Fascism prevailing in Japan, Germany and Italy in 1936 led the INC to establish a Foreign Relations department and to speak out on the international stage against fascist actions undertaken by each of these nations
- Nehru's visit to Soviet Russia in 1927 greatly influenced his ideology in a Marxist and socialist direction. He admired Soviet Russia as the single

biggest force against imperialism and fascism in the world, in spite of his revulsion to Lenin's purges of the 1930s

## 31 The Rise and Growth of Communalism

- Communalism rests on the foundation that the political, social and economic interests of a people are based only on their religious identity and that the interests of one such religious group can never be aligned with another
- It also claims that all political leaders are religious leaders either openly or behind a mask
- Finally, communalism asserts that different religious groups have to have hostile interests and be antagonistic to each other as a matter of dogma
- At the time, Indians were united primarily along linguistic, cultural and class lines than religious lines. Claiming the exact opposite was one of the basic assumptions of communalism
- Communalism was not a holdover from ancient or medieval Indian politics, which ignored the masses wholly. Mass mobilization and participation had to be invented as a form of political action (as happened post 1857 in India) for socialism, nationalism and communalism to emerge as ideologies
- Communalism first took hold among the urban middle class and rural youth who received education and no longer had the ability or interest in the old agricultural livelihoods. Communal reservations in service sector jobs under the Raj were a myopic but effective argument in favor of communalism
- Since religious grouping in India tended to coincide with class and social grouping, communalists could misattribute tension between the classes or between social groups as a communal dispute, even though there was no underlying communal cause of the conflict
- Divide and Rule policies employed by the Raj failed on all counts by the 1920s except their efforts to use communalism to sow division within the national movement, especially by offering the defence of religious minorities from the majority Hindus as a justification for British colonial rule
- Deliberate failure by the Raj to curtail communalist propaganda, rioting, and pandering to the demands of minority communal leaders were all contributing factors to the growth of communalism during the national freedom movement
- Distorted teachings of history formally at the school and informally through popular written and spoken word, presented Indian history as the story of a once mighty Hindu culture that fell into a permanent Dark Age under the 'foreign' rule of Muslim emperors. These false interpretations were encouraged by British historians and quickly latched onto by communal propagandists

## 32 Communalism — The Liberal Phase

- Syed Ahmed in 1887 started communal attempts to oppose the nascent National freedom movement because of his belief in placating the Raj and the wealthy landowners as the path to Muslim upliftment and prosperity
- Tyranny of the Hindu majority if they were to overthrow British rule, a permanent incompatibility and hostility of Hindu and Muslim political interests, religious reservations in government jobs, education and electoral seats were the primary elements of his propaganda
- After the Swadeshi movement of 1905-06, a large section of Muslim intelligentsia abandoned their policy of political inaction and joined the INC
- All India Muslim League was founded in 1907 as a loyalist, conservative, communal organization by some elite Muslims and monarchs
- Anti cow-slaughter, anti-Urdu pro-Hindi, and accusing the INC of sacrificing Hindu interests to appease Muslims were the founding tenets of Hindu communalism in the late 1890s
- Separate electorates for minorities where only one religion could vote and run for seats came with the Morley-Minto reforms of 1907. These were used as a potent justification by communalists to preach cooperation with the Raj and abstaining from the INC and the freedom movement
- From 1912 to 1924, the Muslim League came to be dominated by a more nationalist ideology, which aligned more closely with INC positions against imperialism, but wasn't secular. It believed in opposing the Raj out of a desire to move towards a global Caliphate, not out of any allegiance towards India as a nation
- Khilafat activists largely harmonized with the INC after the Lucknow Pact signed by Tilak and Jinnah in 1916. They did however insist on looking at political questions with a religious lens, and put Muslim solidarity over and above Indian identity, thus keeping the embers of communalism alive
- In 1923, after the Non-cooperation movement had been withdrawn, the Hindu Mahasabha and a resurgent communal Muslim League began to rise to prominence. Several INC leaders were forced by the communal pressure to compromise with the demands of these communal groups
- Instead of opposing communalism at the grassroots, the INC chose a top-down approach. They held negotiations with communalist leaders in an attempt to better merge them into the Freedom movement, and thus implicitly legitimized their status as the representatives of the respective religious groups
- This strategy was largely a failure and the repeated movement of the communal ideology toward the extreme meant that moderate leaders within those communalist groups were forced to keep moving to the fringe or lose their positions of power (M. A. Jinnah within the Muslim League being the most famous example)

### 33 Jinnah, Golwalkar and Extreme Communalism

- It was only after 1937, when communalism moved into its more extremist, fascist phase, that it gained a broad base of appeal. The landlords and wealthy began to shift towards communalism to get the masses within their religion to defend their class interests
- M.A. Jinnah's life illustrates the slippery slope of communalism very well. He started off as a liberal communalist, crowned the 'Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity' when he bitterly opposed the Muslim League's formation in 1906
- In response to Gandhi's plan to commit civil disobedience in 1920, Jinnah left the INC and turned to liberal communalism. He joined the Muslim League and became a proponent of working within the law and using litigation to wrest some power within the British Imperial system
- After a poor showing in the 1937 elections running a nationalist INC adjacent manifesto with the Muslim League, Jinnah saw the reality of the Raj having already fulfilled all of the demands made by liberal communalism and felt compelled to slide into extreme communalism
- By 1939, leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha (V.D. Savarkar) and RSS (M.S. Golwalkar) were establishing the primary message of Hinduism under threat from Islam and the need for a Hindu nation succeeding the Raj
- Minority communities had to either glorify and accept Hinduism or resign themselves to a second-class existence in India, or better yet be ejected from the country if they chose to practice their religion
- In 1937, Jinnah wanted the INC to declare itself a Hindu body and give up its claims of being a secular organization representing all Indians - a non starter for the INC. By 1940, the only card left to Jinnah was to put forth the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims - Pakistan.

### 34 The Crisis at Tripuri to the Cripps Mission

- Subhash Chandra Bose in 1939, decided to turn the INC's policy direction away from the supposed rightists' path of conciliation with the Raj and towards a more violent, extremist path
- After being driven to resign from the position of president by Gandhiji and his faction in the Congress working committees at the Tripuri session of the INC, Bose formed the Forward Bloc within the Congress in March 1939
- British hostility to the idea of granting India a path to Swaraj after the war and only paying lip service to the idea of consulting with INC representatives in this regard expedited the need for another active Satyagraha movement

- A lack of Hindu-Muslim unity, endemic corruption within the INC after 1938-39, and the fact that all possible negotiations had not been exhausted, led the leadership to call off demands for an immediate civil disobedience movement
- By May 1941, thousands of individual satyagrahis had been convicted by the Raj after they performed individual acts of civil disobedience in accordance with Gandhi's plan of warming up the masses with a small scale satyagraha
- Under pressure from his parliament, Churchill was forced to send Stafford Cripps to India in 1942, with a proposal to grant India dominion status after the war in exchange for its active participation in the war effort against the Axis powers

## 35 The Quit India Movement and the INA

- Instability in the Raj because of the war effort, reports of the British abandoning their subjects in south-east Asia when faced with the might of the Japanese, and a need to rouse the masses in preparation for a possible invasion of India by Japan were the main reasons the Quit India movement was initiated in August 1942
- Severe repression by the military and sweeping arrests of the top INC leadership followed in the weeks after the movement was launched
- Gandhi decided to enter a 21 day fast while in prison which had the effect of greatly raising morale among the masses because of the Raj remaining obstinate in its refusal to accommodate Gandhi's demands or to release him
- Successful attempts were made to set up parallel governments in Ballia, U.P., Satara and Tamruk, Bengal by destroying British logistics and forcing the officials to hand power over to the local resistance. These governments only lasted a few weeks till the military came marching in to wrest control back using their superior might
- This movement was significantly more spontaneous and less organized in a top-down fashion than the 1920, 1930-31 or 1932 movements because of steps taken by the INC to make the masses politically aware of their programme and instill in them the basic forms that Satyagraha should take, even in the absence of a central leadership
- By June 1945, the leadership of the INC had been released on health grounds or otherwise to participate in the British offer for partial transfer of power in the Shimla Conference, marking the end of the movement
- In September 1942, the first INA division was formed in Malaya by former soldiers in the British Indian Army, with an aim to cooperate with the Japanese in their anti-British efforts, and to prevent a potential invasion of India by the Japanese



- While accompanying the Japanese in their invasion of Imphal, the INA were forced to endure racism and inferior treatment by the Japanese forces, eventually breaking their morale and preventing them from achieving any military victories against the Raj

## 36 Post-War National Upsurge

- Repression in the aftermath of WWII had only made the masses more determined in their anti-British stance, and the INC leadership found no signs of fatigue or demoralization when they were released in June 1945
- INC (and the Muslim League in Muslim reserved constituencies) swept the elections in 1945 campaigning on the issues of holding the Raj officials to account for their repression in 1942, as well as the defence of the captured INA troops
- These trials mobilized groups hitherto loyal to the Raj, such as Indian soldiers, government officials and landowners, alarming the British Intelligence Service and leading to great leniency by the Government in their releasing of the men on trial
- Armed forces personnel in many provinces revolted violently and were joined by strikes and hartals by the masses in the city in response to the INA trials. Such insubordination had an extraordinary effect on British morale
- Protests were led by the CSP, CPI and Forward Bloc, with no direct Congress participation or authority. Individual INC leaders did participate in some of the protests outside of their role in the Congress
- Since the INC has a strict policy of peaceful negotiation first and civil disobedience after, the INC leaders implored the violent mutineers and protesters to abandon their struggle and go home, to lay the ground for negotiating with the 1946 Cabinet Mission called for by Prime Minister Clement Attlee

## 37 Freedom and Partition

- Raj hegemony over the Indian people depended on the aura of invincibility, the belief in their best intentions for the masses, and the myth that Indians were incapable of governing themselves
- Indian Civil Service, which provided the backbone of British bureaucracy in India, was crumbling starting in 1919, with a decreasing white representation within the service and a lack of promising fresh graduates willing to join the service from Britain with the start of WWII
- INC Ministries formed in the 1937 elections turned the tide in the belief held by loyalists and servicemen as to the efficacy of the Raj's dual policy of

conciliation and repression. It also made real the possibility that the servicemen might have to serve the same INC that they helped repress after India gained independence

- After reaching the conclusion that they would have to quit India by early 1946, the Raj decided to enter negotiations with the INC with an initial stance against any partition of the country in the interest of leaving India a significant military and trading ally
- Attlee in February 1947 fixed the date of withdrawal as 30 June 1948, with the caveat that power would be transferred to multiple centers if the existing provisional government was not fully representative of the nation's minorities
- This pushed Jinnah into threatening communal violence and completely abandoning all participation in the interim government in his attempts to secure Pakistan
- Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, took charge in early 1947, with the modified strategy of granting Jinnah his sovereign state, but compensating the INC by fulfilling all of their remaining demands
- From 3 June to 15 August 1947, hasty and haphazard divisions of the assets of British India and the land boundaries between India and Pakistan had to be drawn up in preparation for Independence Day. This moving forward of the British withdrawal is considered a major reason for the violence surrounding partition
- Communal violence and the loosening of its grip on the administration of Muslim-majority provinces led the INC leaders to agree to the Mountbatten plan and give in to Jinnah's demands for a sovereign Muslim nation
- Secondary reasons for the INC conceding the demand for partition included their delusions of Partition being temporary, peaceful and reversible, if the masses were given the benefit of hindsight

## **38 The Long-Term Strategy of The National Movement**

- Two ideas underpinning the British government's hegemony over the Indian people were the belief in their benevolent commitment to 'modernizing' India and in their military might being so absolute that any opposition to them was futile
- Nationalist leaders sought to develop a counter-hegemonic movement which eroded these two pillars of British hegemony, by raising the political consciousness of the masses, increasing the political space available to them under the Raj and to weaken the hold of the Raj over its civil and military services, manned by a majority of Indians

- Since the masses could only participate in civil disobedience for a limited time, until government repression burnt through their reserves of patience and wealth, the national movement had to alternate between phases of extra-legal satyagraha and legal constitutional action
- Gandhi devised a constructive work programme to keep the masses politically conscious during the passive phases of the freedom movement, pursuing his goals of Harijan upliftment, Hindu-Muslim unity, boycott of foreign goods, and the struggle against untouchability
- Mass movements, by their very nature would have been unsustainable if they hadn't been non-violent, enabling even the common peasant, and women to participate in great numbers. They also flummoxed the colonial authorities by exposing their evil nature when they inevitably chose violent repression as a means to deal with non-violent civil disobedience

## 39 The Indian National Movement — The Ideological Dimension

- Using India as a market for British manufacturing, thus destroying Indian handicrafts, and draining India's wealth to Britain were the two main economic arguments against colonialism as delivered to the Indian masses from the 1890s to 1920s
- INC policy included civil liberty, representative democracy based on universal adult franchise, secularism, minority rights, state ownership of key large-scale industries
- Pro-poor policy to be implemented by a central welfare state, guaranteeing education, fair land revenue policies and the protection of workers' right were the chief pillars of the INC economic policy
- Although Gandhi did not agree with Nehru's socialist ideas and imitation of the Soviet Five-Year Plans, he was still in agreement about state ownership of large industries and nationalization of all key manufacturing and service sector industries
- INC policy was not very clear-cut when it came to the abolition of caste and women's rights. This tragically led to the lack of clear policymaking in Independent India aimed at addressing these social issues



# History of ancient and early medieval India

## Introduction : Ideas of the Early Indian Past

- Book Citation : Singh, 2009
- Subcontinental India (referring to modern day India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh) can be divided into major geographical regions based on the dominant river systems, mountain ranges or plateaus.
- Movement of goods and people between India's geographical regions and outside the subcontinent has been observed since ancient times.
- Prehistory ended with the invention of the Mesopotamian Cuneiform script (3400 BCE) and Egyptian Hieroglyphics (3100 BCE), and the Harappan script (3000 BCE)
- Since the Harappan script has not yet been deciphered, protohistory in the context of India refers to the period 1500 BCE - 500 CE, which has an oral literature but no direct written sources.
- Historiography in India began with the Orientalist stage of early 18th and 19th century British India, with the founding of the ASI in 1871 characterized by a western-centric critique of Indian customs and traditions, an over-reliance on Brahmanical interpretations of scripture.
- Spurred on by the national freedom movement, nationalist historians contributed to Indian historiography by glorifying India's past as a Golden Age to be ended by the arrival of Muslim invaders.
- Marxist historians made the perspective shift of dividing history into periods based on class-relations and agrarian norms, instead of the prevailing political stratification.
- Historical narratives have suffered from textual sources being the primary driver with archaeological sources only being used as corroborating evidence.
- Most of the people in India's ancient past are not represented in its history because of the monopoly of the literate and elite few of the time in recording

written information. Archaeological data becomes the main way to tell the stories of these forgotten populations.

## **1 Understanding Literary and Archaeological Sources**

### **1.1 Reading Ancient Texts from a Historical Point of View**

- Unlike China, which evolved paper by the 3rd century BCE and wood-block printing by 4th century BCE, India still had a vibrant tradition of palm leaf manuscripts all the way from antiquity to the 19th century when the printing press finally superseded it.
- Texts have been composed over centuries of oral tradition before they were compiled, finalized and written down, which makes historical context of the physical manuscript much narrower than the work being written down.
- The Vedas (written in Sanskrit), which are the oldest surviving Indian text belong to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. The other major linguistic family in India is the Dravidian family, which covers all south Indian modern day languages.
- In Ancient India, there was no delineation between the religious and secular teachings contained within a religion (such as Dharma or the Buddhist Dhamma)
- The four Vedas (dated at about 1500 BCE - 500 BCE) are the world's oldest existing poetry which are primarily a guide to religious rituals and the philosophical interpretations of such rituals. They are religious texts, with very few references to historical events, and thus, cannot be used to infer much about the sociology or history of ancient Northern and North-western India.
- Mahabharata (composed over 400 BCE - 400 CE) and the Ramayana (composed over 500 BCE to 300 CE) are the two epics of ancient India. Characters, location and events from the two epics are mentioned in the other, showing that these were not isolated works.
- Events and characters described in the two epics have not been verified to be true. They may simply have been small scale conflicts glorified by bards and poets over the centuries.
- Puranas, Dharmashastras, and other Vedanga texts solidify Hindu traditions such as the stratification of society, the rights of women, and other prescriptive actions to be undertaken in the quest for Moksha. Contradictions and divergent commentaries within the Vedangas are a result of the many centuries over which these works were composed.
- Buddhist, Jain, early Tamil (Sangam), Kannada and Tulu literature provides many religious, philosophical, scientific, technical and dramatic works to

draw historical information from. These works, however, need to be interpreted carefully because of the nature of the patron-artist relationship under which most of them were produced.

- Accounts of foreign travelers from China (Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang), Persia (Al-Biruni) and Greece (Megasthenes) are a valuable window into the life and times of ancient and early medieval India.

## 1.2 Archaeology and the Early Indian Past

- Material evidence found at a site often depends on the forces of nature that may or may not have destroyed part of it (usually the organic artefacts), the movement of human settlements the centuries as a result of natural disasters, and their stratigraphy within the archaeological site.
- In India, underwater archaeology deals with entire cities that have been submerged over the centuries (such as Dwaraka, Gujarat) requiring modern advances in remote sensing, radar, and diving.
- Over the last 50 years, the advent of archaeometry (most famously Carbon-14 dating) has enabled a much less intrusive and hands-off method of analysing artefacts, especially those buried deep underground or undersea.
- Palaeontology and the related field of paleo-pathology, which looks at the diseases and deaths of past human societies are also enabled by advances in modern medicine.
- In India, more-so than the rest of the world, ancient crafts, techniques and workmanship survives, making the study of these modern day craftsmen a useful tool in piecing together the picture of unearthed ancient artefacts.

## 1.3 Epigraphy: The Study of Inscriptions

- Epigraphy in India starts with the un-deciphered Harappan script, with the 400 BCE Brahmi script around the time of Ashoka being the earliest fully deciphered one.
- In a script, a written symbol stands for a word (logographic), a syllable (syllabic) or a sound (alphabetic). The last category requires that vowels exist fully independent of consonants.
- The Brahmi script developed from 300 BCE to 600 CE evolved into the Devanagari script (around 1000 CE) and proto-Bengali in eastern India (around 1200 CE).
- Modern Tamil script took shape around 700 CE emerging from local varieties of Brahmi, around the time of the Pallava dynasty. Other South Indian scripts evolved by 1400 CE.

- Scholars working for the East India Company in the 1800s deciphered the Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts painstakingly over many years, with the assistance of bi-script documents acting as Rosetta stones.
- Sanskrit subsumed Prakrit as the language of high culture and learning by 500 CE, along with Tamil in South India achieving the same status by 700 CE
- Dates on inscriptions usually were eras based on the ascension of Kings, or the start of dynasties, along with the luni-solar Hindu calendar.
- Most inscriptions tend to be dedication set great men and women, memorials of martyrs and soldiers, records of land or wealth donated by kings, or simple records of the existing political, social and economic climate made by common folk.

#### **1.4 Numismatics: The Study of Coins**

- Since coins from the same time degrade in size and weight the longer they circulate, metrology offers an immediate means of dating the sites at which they are found.
- The earliest coinage in India appeared around 400 BCE, usually made of silver or copper even though barter still continued as an alternative medium of commerce.
- Coins of low value often used copper, lead, tin, bronze or other alloys with silver and were issued either by royal decree or by private guilds.
- Legends on coins are rarely dates or other chronological information. They are usually observed to be the names of kings, the mint towns where they were produced, or a religious inscription.
- Counter-struck coins are valuable sources of information about political rivalries, conquest and succession, and the geographical spans of kingdoms in ancient and early medieval India



# Glossary

**archaeometry** the use of modern scientific measurements to analyse ancient objects. 27

**arya samaj** monotheistic Hindu reform movement, based on the infallibility of the Vedas. 15

**caliphate** global political-religious entity united by Islamic faith and ruled by a monarch. 18

**coinage** metal currency, with a standardized size, shape and authoritative stamp. 28

**counter-struck** the act of punching a new set of inscriptions on a coin already minted by another authority. Usually this process did not completely obscure the older visuals. 28

**dhamma** Buddhist variation of the ancient Hindu Dharma. 26

**dharma** an exemplary way of life to be followed, including codes of conduct, ritual practices, forms of worship and philosophical ideas. 26, 29

**drain theory** the draining of capital from India to Britain primarily by way of an import-export imbalance, the wages and operating costs of the Indian government, and the interest on loans given by Britain to the Indian Government. 5

**epigraphy** the study of inscriptions - any writing engraved on a material such as wood, clay, bronze, stone etc.. 27

**harijan** Gandhi's term for the untouchable castes. 13

**histrigraphy** the scholarly activity of constructing and writing history. 1, 25

**legend** inscriptions on a coin, usually on the obverse, or frontal side. 28

**metrology** measurement and arrangement of coins by size or weight. 28

**moksha** freedom the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The final goal of all virtuous action.. 26

**nizam** title of the hereditary ruler of princely Hyderabad. 15

**palentology** analysis of animal remains over long periods of time ranging from centuries to geological eras. 27

**praja mandal** State People's Conferences, for the subjects of princely states. 15

**prehistory** history before human society had invented the recording of information through writing. 25

**protohistory** records of a people who did not have writing of their own, but have been mentioned in the writings of another contemporary society. 25

**raj** the British Imperial Government in India. 2

**stratigraphy** the depth or layer at which an artefact is found when excavating a site that has been populated for a long time, resulting in newer material buried on top of older ones.. 27

**swaraj** self-governance as declared by the Indian freedom movement. 7

**zamindar** a landowner who leases his land to tenant farmers. 3



# Abbreviations

**AIKSC** All India Kisan Sabha Congress. 14  
**AISPC** All India States' People's Congress. 15  
**AITUC** All India Trade Union Congress. 10  
**ASI** Archaeological Society of India. 25

**CPI** Communist Party of India. 10  
**CSP** Congress Socialist Party. 13

**FICCI** Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry. 16

**HRA** Hindustan Republican Army. 11

**ICS** Indian Civil Service. 4  
**ILC** Imperial Legislative Council. 6  
**INA** Indian National Army. 20  
**INC** Indian National Congress. 4  
**IPC** Indian Penal Code. 6  
**IRA** Indian Revolutionary Army. 11

**RSS** Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. 19

**SAD** Shiromani Akali Dal. 10

**UP** Uttar Pradesh. 9



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