**[British rule](https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire)**

**Establishment of direct British governance**

**Government of India Act of 1858**

Much of the blame for the mutiny fell on the ineptitude of the East India Company. On August 2, 1858, Parliament passed the Government of India Act, transferring British power over India from the company to the crown. The merchant company’s residual powers were vested in the secretary of state for India, a minister of Great Britain’s cabinet, who would preside over the India Office in London and be assisted and advised, especially in financial matters, by a Council of India, which consisted initially of 15 Britons, 7 of whom were elected from among the old company’s court of directors and 8 of whom were appointed by the crown. Though some of Britain’s most powerful political leaders became secretaries of state for India in the latter half of the 19th century, actual control over the government of India remained in the hands of British viceroys—who divided their time between Calcutta (Kolkata) and Simla (Shimla)—and their “steel frame” of approximately 1,500 Indian Civil Service (ICS) officials posted “on the spot” throughout British India.

## Social policy

On November 1, 1858, [Lord Canning](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-John-Canning-Earl-Canning) (governed 1856–62) announced [Queen Victoria](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Victoria-queen-of-United-Kingdom)’s proclamation to “the Princes, Chiefs and Peoples of India,” which unveiled a new British policy of perpetual support for “native princes” and nonintervention in matters of religious belief or worship within British India. The announcement reversed [Lord Dalhousie](https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Andrew-Broun-Ramsay-Marquess-of-Dalhousie)’s prewar policy of political unification through princely state annexation, and princes were left free to adopt any heirs they desired so long as they all swore undying [allegiance](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/allegiance) to the British crown. In 1876, at the prompting of Prime Minister [Benjamin Disraeli](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Benjamin-Disraeli), Queen Victoria added the title Empress of India to her regality. British fears of another mutiny and consequent determination to [bolster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bolster) Indian states as “natural breakwaters” against any future [tidal wave](https://www.britannica.com/science/tsunami) of revolt thus left more than 560 enclaves of autocratic princely rule to survive, interspersed throughout British India, for the entire nine decades of crown rule. The new policy of religious nonintervention was born equally out of fear of recurring mutiny, which many Britons believed had been triggered by orthodox [Hindu](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hinduism) and [Muslim](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam) reaction against the secularizing inroads of [utilitarian positivism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/positivism) and the [proselytizing](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/proselytizing) of [Christian missionaries](https://www.britannica.com/topic/missions-Christianity). British liberal socioreligious reform therefore came to a halt for more than three decades—essentially from the East India Company’s Hindu Widow’s Remarriage Act of 1856 to the crown’s timid Age of Consent Act of 1891, which merely raised the age of [statutory rape](https://www.britannica.com/topic/statutory-rape) for “consenting” Indian brides from 10 years to 12.

The typical attitude of British officials who went to India during that period was, as the English writer [Rudyard Kipling](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudyard-Kipling) put it, to “take up the white man’s burden.” By and large, throughout the interlude of their Indian service to the [crown](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/crown), Britons lived as super-bureaucrats, “Pukka Sahibs,” remaining as aloof as possible from “native contamination” in their private clubs and well-guarded military cantonments (called camps), which were constructed beyond the walls of the old, crowded “native” cities in that era. The new British military towns were initially erected as secure bases for the reorganized British regiments and were designed with straight roads wide enough for cavalry to gallop through whenever needed. The old company’s three armies (located in [Bengal](https://www.britannica.com/place/Bengal-region-Asia), Bombay [[Mumbai](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mumbai)], and Madras [[Chennai](https://www.britannica.com/place/Chennai)]), which in 1857 had only 43,000 British to 228,000 native troops, were reorganized by 1867 to a much “safer” mix of 65,000 British to 140,000 Indian soldiers. Selective new British recruitment policies screened out all “nonmartial” (meaning previously disloyal) Indian [castes](https://www.britannica.com/topic/caste-social-differentiation) and ethnic groups from armed service and mixed the soldiers in every regiment, thus permitting no single caste or linguistic or religious group to again dominate a British Indian garrison. Indian soldiers were also restricted from handling certain sophisticated weaponry.

After 1869, with the completion of the [Suez Canal](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Suez-Canal) and the steady expansion of steam transport reducing the sea passage between Britain and India from about three months to only three weeks, British women came to the East with ever greater [alacrity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alacrity), and the British officials they married found it more appealing to return home with their British wives during furloughs than to tour India as their predecessors had done. While the [intellectual](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual) [calibre](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/calibre) of British recruits to the ICS in that era was, on the average, probably higher than that of servants recruited under the company’s earlier patronage system, British contacts with Indian society diminished in every respect (fewer British men, for example, openly consorted with Indian women), and British sympathy for and understanding of Indian life and [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture) were, for the most part, replaced by suspicion, indifference, and fear.

Queen Victoria’s 1858 promise of racial [equality of opportunity](https://www.britannica.com/topic/equal-opportunity) in the selection of civil servants for the government of India had theoretically thrown the ICS open to qualified Indians, but examinations for the services were given only in Britain and only to male applicants between the ages of 17 and 22 (in 1878 the maximum age was further reduced to 19) who could stay in the saddle over a rigorous series of hurdles. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that by 1869 only one Indian candidate had managed to clear those obstacles to win a coveted admission to the ICS. British royal promises of equality were thus subverted in actual implementation by jealous, fearful [bureaucrats](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bureaucrats) posted “on the spot.”

**Government organization**

From 1858 to 1909 the government of India was an increasingly centralized paternal despotism and the world’s largest imperial [bureaucracy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bureaucracy). The [Indian Councils Act](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-Councils-Act-1861-India) of 1861 transformed the viceroy’s Executive Council into a miniature cabinet run on the portfolio system, and each of the five ordinary members was placed in charge of a distinct department of Calcutta’s government—home, revenue, military, finance, and law. The military commander in chief sat with that council as an extraordinary member. A sixth ordinary member was assigned to the viceroy’s Executive Council after 1874, initially to preside over the Department of Public Works, which after 1904 came to be called Commerce and Industry. Though the government of India was by statutory definition the “Governor-General-in-Council” ([governor-general](https://www.britannica.com/topic/governor-general) remained the viceroy’s [alternate](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/alternate) title), the viceroy was empowered to overrule his councillors if ever he deemed that necessary. He personally took charge of the Foreign Department, which was mostly concerned with relations with princely states and bordering foreign powers. Few viceroys found it necessary to assert their full despotic authority, since the majority of their councillors usually were in agreement. In 1879, however, [Viceroy Lytton](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Bulwer-Lytton-1st-earl-of-Lytton) (governed 1876–80) felt obliged to overrule his entire council in order to accommodate demands for the elimination of his government’s import duties on British cotton manufactures, despite India’s desperate need for [revenue](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/revenue) in a year of widespread famine and agricultural disorders.

From 1854 additional members met with the viceroy’s Executive Council for legislative purposes, and by the act of 1861 their permissible number was raised to between 6 and 12, no fewer than half of whom were to be nonofficial. While the viceroy appointed all such legislative councillors and was empowered to veto any bill passed on to him by that body, its debates were to be open to a limited public audience, and several of its nonofficial members were Indian nobility and loyal landowners. For the government of India the legislative council sessions thus served as a crude public-opinion barometer and the beginnings of an advisory “safety valve” that provided the viceroy with early crisis warnings at the minimum possible risk of parliamentary-type opposition. The act of 1892 further expanded the council’s permissible additional membership to 16, of whom 10 could be nonofficial, and increased their powers, though only to the extent of allowing them to ask questions of government and to criticize formally the official budget during one day reserved for that purpose at the very end of each year’s legislative session in Calcutta. The Supreme Council, however, still remained quite remote from any sort of parliament.

**Economic policy and development**

Economically, it was an era of increased commercial agricultural production, rapidly expanding trade, early industrial development, and severe [famine](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/famine). The [total cost](https://www.britannica.com/topic/total-cost) of the mutiny of 1857–59, which was equivalent to a normal year’s revenue, was charged to India and paid off from increased revenue resources in four years. The major source of government income throughout that period remained the land revenue, which, as a percentage of the agricultural yield of India’s soil, continued to be “an annual gamble in monsoon rains.” Usually, however, it provided about half of British India’s gross annual revenue, or roughly the money needed to support the army. The second most lucrative source of revenue at that time was the government’s continued monopoly over the flourishing [opium trade](https://www.britannica.com/topic/opium-trade) to China; the third was the tax on salt, also jealously guarded by the crown as its official monopoly preserve. An individual [income tax](https://www.britannica.com/topic/income-tax) was introduced for five years to pay off the war deficit, but urban personal income was not added as a regular source of Indian revenue until 1886.

Despite continued British [adherence](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adherence) to the doctrine of laissez-faire during that period, a 10 percent [customs duty](https://www.britannica.com/topic/tariff) was levied in 1860 to help clear the war debt, though it was reduced to 7 percent in 1864 and to 5 percent in 1875. The above-mentioned cotton import duty, abolished in 1879 by Viceroy Lytton, was not reimposed on British imports of piece goods and yarn until 1894, when the value of silver fell so precipitously on the world market that the government of India was forced to take action, even against the economic interests of the home country (i.e., textiles in Lancashire), by adding enough rupees to its revenue to make ends meet. Bombay’s textile industry had by then developed more than 80 power mills, and the huge Empress Mill owned by Indian industrialist [Jamsetji (Jamshedji) N. Tata](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jamsetji-Nusserwanji-Tata) (1839–1904) was in full operation at [Nagpur](https://www.britannica.com/place/Nagpur-India), competing directly with Lancashire mills for the vast Indian market. Britain’s mill owners again demonstrated their power in Calcutta by forcing the government of India to impose an “equalizing” 5 percent excise tax on all cloth manufactured in India, thereby convincing many Indian mill owners and capitalists that their best interests would be served by contributing financial support to the [Indian National Congress](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-National-Congress).

Britain’s major contribution to India’s economic development throughout the era of crown rule was the railroad network that spread so swiftly across the subcontinent after 1858, when there were barely 200 miles (320 km) of track in all of India. By 1869 more than 5,000 miles (8,000 km) of steel track had been completed by British railroad companies, and by 1900 there were some 25,000 miles (40,000 km) of rail laid. By the start of [World War I](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I) (1914–18) the total had reached 35,000 miles (56,000 km), almost the full growth of British India’s rail net. Initially, the railroads proved a mixed blessing for most Indians, since, by linking India’s agricultural, village-based heartland to the British imperial port cities of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, they served both to [accelerate](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/accelerate) the pace of raw-material extraction from India and to speed up the transition from subsistence food to commercial agricultural production. Middlemen hired by port-city agency houses rode the trains inland and induced village headmen to convert large tracts of grain-yielding land to commercial crops.

Large sums of silver were offered in payment for raw materials when the British demand was high, as was the case throughout the [American Civil War](https://www.britannica.com/event/American-Civil-War) (1861–65), but, after the Civil War ended, restoring raw cotton from the southern [United States](https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States) to Lancashire mills, the Indian market collapsed. Millions of peasants weaned from grain production now found themselves riding the boom-and-bust tiger of a world-market economy. They were unable to convert their commercial agricultural surplus back into food during depression years, and from 1865 through 1900 India experienced a series of protracted famines, which in 1896 was complicated by the introduction of [bubonic plague](https://www.britannica.com/science/bubonic-plague) (spread from Bombay, where infected rats were brought from China). As a result, though the population of the subcontinent increased dramatically from about 200 million in 1872 (the year of the first almost universal census) to more than 319 million in 1921, the population may have declined slightly between 1895 and 1905.

The spread of [railroads](https://www.britannica.com/technology/railroad) also accelerated the destruction of India’s [indigenous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indigenous) handicraft industries, for trains filled with cheap competitive manufactured goods shipped from England now rushed to inland towns for distribution to villages, underselling the rougher products of Indian craftsmen. Entire handicraft villages thus lost their traditional markets of neighbouring agricultural villagers, and craftsmen were forced to abandon their looms and spinning wheels and return to the soil for their livelihood. By the end of the 19th century a larger proportion of India’s population (perhaps more than three-fourths) depended directly on agriculture for support than at the century’s start, and the pressure of population on arable land increased throughout that period. Railroads also provided the military with [swift](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/swift) and relatively assured access to all parts of the country in the event of emergency and were eventually used to transport grain for famine relief as well.

The rich coalfields of [Bihar](https://www.britannica.com/place/Bihar) began to be mined during that period to help power the imported British locomotives, and coal production jumped from roughly 500,000 tons in 1868 to some 6,000,000 tons in 1900 and more than 20,000,000 tons by 1920. Coal was used for iron smelting in India as early as 1875, but the Tata Iron and Steel Company (now part of the [Tata Group](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tata-Group)), which received no government aid, did not start production until 1911, when, in Bihar, it launched India’s modern steel industry. Tata grew rapidly after World War I, and by World War II it had become the largest single steel complex in the [British Commonwealth](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-association-of-states). The jute textile industry, Bengal’s counterpart to Bombay’s cotton industry, developed in the wake of the [Crimean War](https://www.britannica.com/event/Crimean-War) (1853–56), which, by cutting off Russia’s supply of raw hemp to the jute mills of Scotland, stimulated the export of raw jute from Calcutta to Dundee. In 1863 there were only two jute mills in Bengal, but by 1882 there were 20, employing more than 20,000 workers.

The most important plantation industries of the era were tea, indigo, and coffee. British tea plantations were started in northern India’s [Assam Hills](https://www.britannica.com/place/Assam-Himalayas) in the 1850s and in southern India’s [Nilgiri Hills](https://www.britannica.com/place/Nilgiri-Hills) some 20 years later. By 1871 there were more than 300 tea plantations, covering in excess of 30,000 [cultivated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cultivated) acres (12,000 hectares) and producing some 3,000 tons of tea. By 1900 India’s tea crop was large enough to export 68,500 tons to Britain, displacing the tea of China in London. The flourishing indigo industry of Bengal and Bihar was threatened with extinction during the “Blue Mutiny” (violent riots by cultivators in 1859–60), but India continued to export indigo to European markets until the end of the 19th century, when [synthetic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/synthetic) dyes made that natural product obsolete. Coffee plantations flourished in southern India from 1860 to 1879, after which disease [blighted](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blighted) the crop and sent Indian coffee into a decade of decline.

**Foreign policy**

**The northwest frontier**

British India expanded beyond its company borders to both the northwest and the northeast during the initial phase of crown rule. The turbulent tribal frontier to the northwest remained a continuing source of harassment to settled British rule, and Pathan ([Pashtun](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pashtun)) raiders served as a constant lure and justification to champions of the “forward school” of imperialism in the colonial offices of Calcutta and Simla and in the imperial government offices at Whitehall, London. Russian expansion into [Central Asia](https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Central-Asia-102306) in the 1860s provided even greater anxiety and [incentive](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/incentive) to British proconsuls in India, as well as at the Foreign Office in London, to advance the frontier of the Indian empire beyond the [Hindu Kush](https://www.britannica.com/place/Hindu-Kush) mountain range and, indeed, up to [Afghanistan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan)’s northern border along the [Amu Darya](https://www.britannica.com/place/Amu-Darya). Lord Canning, however, was far too preoccupied with trying to restore tranquillity within India to consider embarking on anything more ambitious than the northwest frontier punitive expedition policy (commonly called “butcher and bolt”), which was generally regarded as the simplest, cheapest method of “pacifying” the Pathans. As viceroy, [Lord Lawrence](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Laird-Mair-Lawrence-1st-Baron-Lawrence) (governed 1864–69) continued the same border pacification policy and resolutely refused to be pushed or lured into the ever-simmering cauldron of Afghan politics. In 1863, when the popular old emir [Dōst Moḥammad Khan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dost-Mohammad-Khan) died, Lawrence wisely [refrained](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/refrained) from attempting to name his successor, leaving Dōst Moḥammad’s 16 sons to fight their own fratricidal battles until 1868, when [Shīr ʿAlī Khan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shir-Ali-Khan) finally emerged victorious. Lawrence then recognized and subsidized the new emir. The viceroy, [Lord Mayo](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Southwell-Bourke-6th-earl-of-Mayo) (governed 1869–72), met to confer with Shīr ʿAlī at Ambala in 1869 and, though reaffirming Anglo-Afghan friendship, resisted all requests by the emir for more permanent and practical support for his still precarious regime. Lord Mayo, the only British viceroy killed in office, was assassinated by an Afghan prisoner on the [Andaman Islands](https://www.britannica.com/place/Andaman-Islands) in 1872.

**The**[**Second Anglo-Afghan War**](https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Anglo-Afghan-War)

Russia’s glacial advance into [Turkistan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkistan) sufficiently alarmed Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and his secretary of state for India, [Robert Salisbury](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Arthur-Talbot-Gascoyne-Cecil-3rd-marquess-of-Salisbury), that by 1874, when they came to power in London, they pressed the government of India to pursue a more [vigorous](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/vigorous) interventionist line with the Afghan government. The viceroy, [Lord Northbrook](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-George-Baring-1st-Earl-of-Northbrook) (governed 1872–76), resisting all such cabinet promptings to reverse Lawrence’s noninterventionist policy and to return to the militant posture of the [First Anglo-Afghan War](https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Anglo-Afghan-War) era (1839–42), resigned his office rather than accept orders from ministers whose diplomatic judgment he believed to be disastrously distorted by Russophobia. Lord Lytton, however, who succeeded him as viceroy, was more than eager to act as his [prime minister](https://www.britannica.com/topic/prime-minister) desired, and, soon after he reached Calcutta, he notified Shīr ʿAlī that he was sending a “mission” to [Kabul](https://www.britannica.com/place/Kabul). When the emir refused Lytton permission to enter Afghanistan, the viceroy bellicosely declaimed that Afghanistan was but “an earthen pipkin between two metal pots.” He did not, however, take action against the kingdom until 1878, when Russia’s General Stolyetov was admitted to Kabul while Lytton’s [envoy](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/envoy), [Sir Neville Chamberlain](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Neville-Chamberlain), was turned back at the border by Afghan troops. The viceroy decided to crush his neighbouring “pipkin” and launched the Second Anglo-Afghan War on November 21, 1878, with a British invasion. Shīr ʿAlī fled his capital and country, dying in exile early in 1879. The British army occupied Kabul, as it had in the first war, and a treaty signed at Gandamak on May 26, 1879, was concluded with the former emir’s son, Yaʿqūb Khan. [Yaʿqūb Khan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yaqub-Khan) promised, in exchange for British support and protection, to admit to his Kabul court a British resident who would direct Afghan [foreign relations](https://www.britannica.com/topic/international-relations), but the resident, Sir Louis Cavagnari, was assassinated on September 3, 1879, just two months after he arrived. British troops [trudged](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/trudged) back over the passes to Kabul and removed Yaʿqūb from the throne, which remained vacant until July 1880, when [ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Khan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abdur-Rahman-Khan), nephew of Shīr ʿAlī, became emir. The new emir, one of the shrewdest statesmen in Afghan history, remained secure on the throne until his death in 1901.

The viceroy, [Lord Lansdowne](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Charles-Keith-Petty-Fitzmaurice-5th-marquess-of-Lansdowne) (governed 1888–94), who sought to reassert a more forward policy in Afghanistan, did so on the advice of his military commander in chief, Lord Roberts, who had served as field commander in the Second Anglo-Afghan War. In 1893 Lansdowne sent Sir Mortimer Durand, the government of India’s foreign secretary, on a mission to Kabul to open negotiations on the delimitation of the Indo-Afghan border. The delimitation, known as the [Durand Line](https://www.britannica.com/event/Durand-Line), was completed in 1896 and added the tribal territory of the [Afrīdī](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Afridi)s, Maḥsūds, Wazīrīs, and Swātīs, as well as the chieftainships of Chitral and Gilgit, to the domain of British India. The [9th earl of Elgin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Victor-Alexander-Bruce-9th-earl-of-Elgin) (governed 1894–99), Lansdowne’s successor, devoted much of his viceregal [tenure](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tenure) to sending British Indian armies on punitive expeditions along the new frontier. The viceroy, [Lord Curzon](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lord-Curzon) (governed 1899–1905), however, recognized the impracticality of trying to administer the turbulent frontier region as part of the large Punjab province. Thus, in 1901 he created a new North-West Frontier Province ([Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](https://www.britannica.com/place/Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa)) containing some 40,000 square miles (about 100,000 square km) of trans-Indus and tribal borderland territory under a British chief commissioner responsible directly to the viceroy. By instituting a policy of regular payments to frontier tribes, the new province reduced border conflicts, though for the next decade British troops continued to fight against Maḥsūds, Wazīrīs, and Zakka Khel Afrīdīs.

**The incorporation of Burma**

British India’s conquest of Burma ([Myanmar](https://www.britannica.com/place/Myanmar)) was completed during that period. The [Second Anglo-Burmese War](https://www.britannica.com/event/Anglo-Burmese-Wars) (1852) had left the kingdom of Ava (Upper Burma; *see* [Alaungpaya dynasty](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Alaungpaya-Dynasty)) independent of British India, and, under the rule of [King Mindon](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mindon) (1853–78), who built his capital at [Mandalay](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mandalay-Myanmar), steamers bringing British residents and private traders up the [Irrawaddy River](https://www.britannica.com/place/Irrawaddy-River) from Rangoon ([Yangon](https://www.britannica.com/place/Yangon)) were welcomed. Mindon, noted for [convening](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/convening) the Fifth Buddhist Council at Mandalay in 1871 (the first such council in some 1,900 years), was succeeded by a younger son, Thibaw, who in February 1879 celebrated his ascendancy to the throne by having 80 siblings massacred. Thibaw refused to renew his father’s treaty agreements with Britain, turning instead to seek commercial relations with the French, who were then advancing toward his kingdom from their base in [Southeast Asia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Southeast-Asia). Thibaw sent envoys to Paris, and in January 1885 the French signed a treaty of trade with the kingdom of Ava and dispatched a French consul to Mandalay. That envoy hoped to establish a French bank in [Upper Burma](https://www.britannica.com/place/Upper-Burma) to finance the construction of a railway and the general commercial development of the kingdom, but his plans were thwarted. The viceroy, [Lord Dufferin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Temple-Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood-1st-Marquess-of-Dufferin-and-Ava) (governed 1884–88)—impatient with Thibaw for delaying a treaty agreement with British India, goaded to action by British traders in Rangoon, and provoked by fears of French intervention in Britain’s “sphere”—sent an expedition of some 10,000 troops up the Irrawaddy in November 1885. The Third Anglo-Burmese War ended in less than a month with the loss of hardly 20 lives, and on January 1, 1886, Upper Burma, a kingdom having a greater area than Britain and a population of some 4,000,000, was [annexed](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/annexed) by proclamation to British India.

**Indian nationalism and the British response, 1885–1920**

**Origins of the nationalist movement**

The [Indian National Congress](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-National-Congress) (Congress Party) held its first meeting in December 1885 in Bombay city while British Indian troops were still fighting in Upper Burma. Thus, just as the British Indian empire approached its outermost limits of expansion, the institutional seed of the largest of its national successors was sown. Provincial roots of Indian nationalism, however, may be traced to the beginning of the era of crown rule in Bombay, Bengal, and Madras. Nationalism emerged in 19th-century British India both in emulation of and as a reaction against the consolidation of British rule and the spread of Western civilization. There were, moreover, two turbulent national mainstreams flowing beneath the deceptively [placid](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/placid) official surface of British administration: the larger, headed by the Indian National Congress, which led eventually to the birth of India, and the smaller Muslim one, which acquired its organizational skeleton with the founding of the [Muslim League](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Muslim-League) in 1906 and led to the creation of Pakistan.

Many English-educated young Indians of the post-mutiny period emulated their British mentors by seeking employment in the ICS, the legal services, journalism, and education. The universities of Bombay, Bengal, and Madras had been founded in 1857 as the capstone of the East India Company’s modest policy of selectively fostering the introduction of English education in India. At the beginning of crown rule, the first graduates of those universities, reared on the works and ideas of [Jeremy Bentham](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jeremy-Bentham), [John Stuart Mill](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Stuart-Mill), and [Thomas Macaulay](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Babington-Macaulay-Baron-Macaulay), sought positions that would help them improve themselves and society at the same time. They were convinced that, with the education they had received and the proper apprenticeship of hard work, they would eventually inherit the machinery of British Indian government. Few Indians, however, were admitted to the ICS, and, among the first handful who were, one of the brightest, [Surendranath Banerjea](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Surendranath-Banerjea) (1848–1925), was dismissed dishonourably at the earliest pretext and turned from loyal participation within the government to active nationalist agitation against it. Banerjea became a Calcutta college teacher and then editor of *The Bengalee* and founder of the [Indian Association](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-Association) in Calcutta. In 1883 he [convened](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/convened) the first Indian National Conference in Bengal, anticipating by two years the birth of the Congress Party on the opposite side of India. After the first partition of Bengal in 1905, Banerjea attained nationwide fame as a leader of the *swadeshi* (“of our own country”) movement, promoting Indian-made goods, and the movement to [boycott](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/boycott) British manufactured goods.

During the 1870s young leaders in Bombay also established a number of provincial political associations, such as the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (Poona Public Society), founded by [Mahadev Govind Ranade](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahadev-Govind-Ranade) (1842–1901), who had graduated at the top of the first bachelor of arts class at the University of Bombay (now [University of Mumbai](https://www.britannica.com/topic/University-of-Mumbai)) in 1862. Ranade found employment in the educational department in Bombay, taught at Elphinstone College, edited the *Indu Prakash*, helped start the Hindu reformist [Prarthana Samaj](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Prarthana-Samaj) (Prayer Society) in Bombay, wrote historical and other essays, and became a barrister, eventually being appointed to the bench of Bombay’s high court. Ranade was one of the early leaders of India’s emulative school of nationalism, as was his brilliant [disciple](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disciple) [Gopal Krishna Gokhale](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gopal-Krishna-Gokhale) (1866–1915), later revered by Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi (1869–1948) as a political guru (preceptor). [Gokhale](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gopal-Krishna-Gokhale), an editor and social reformer, taught at Fergusson College in Poona ([Pune](https://www.britannica.com/place/Pune)) and in 1905 was elected president of the Congress Party. Moderation and reform were the keynotes of Gokhale’s life, and, by his use of reasoned argument, patient labour, and unflagging faith in the ultimate [equity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equity) of British liberalism, he was able to achieve much for India.

[Bal Gangadhar Tilak](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bal-Gangadhar-Tilak) (1856–1920), Gokhale’s colleague at Fergusson College, was the leader of Indian nationalism’s revolutionary reaction against British rule. Tilak was Poona’s most popular Marathi journalist, whose [vernacular](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular) newspaper, *Kesari* (“Lion”), became the leading literary thorn in the side of the British. The Lokamanya (“Revered by the People”), as Tilak came to be called after he was jailed for seditious writings in 1897, looked to orthodox [Hinduism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hinduism) and [Maratha](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maratha) history as his twin sources of nationalist inspiration. Tilak called on his compatriots to take keener interest and pride in the religious, cultural, martial, and political glories of pre-British Hindu India; in Poona, former capital of the Maratha Hindu glory, he helped found and publicize the popular [Ganesha](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ganesha) (Ganapati) and [Shivaji](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shivaji) festivals in the 1890s. Tilak had no faith in British [justice](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/justice), and his life was devoted primarily to agitation aimed at ousting the British from India by any means and restoring swaraj (self-rule, or independence) to India’s people. While Tilak brought many non-English-educated Hindus into the nationalist movement, the orthodox Hindu character of his revolutionary revival (which mellowed considerably in the latter part of his political career) alienated many within India’s Muslim minority and [exacerbated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exacerbated) communal tensions and conflict.

The viceroyalties of Lytton and [Lord Ripon](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Frederick-Samuel-Robinson-1st-marquess-of-Ripon) (governed 1880–84) prepared the soil of British India for nationalism, the former by internal measures of repression and the futility of an external policy of aggression, the latter indirectly as a result of the [European community’s](https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-Community-European-economic-association) rejection of his liberal humanitarian legislation. One of the key men who helped arrange the first meeting of the Congress was a retired British official, [Allan Octavian Hume](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Allan-Octavian-Hume) (1829–1912), Ripon’s radical confidant. After retiring from the ICS in 1882, Hume, a [mystic](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/mystic) reformer and ornithologist, lived in Simla, where he studied birds and theosophy. Hume had joined the Theosophical Society in 1881, as had many young Indians, who found in [theosophy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/theosophy) a movement most flattering to Indian civilization.

[Helena Blavatsky](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Helena-Blavatsky) (1831–91), the Russian-born cofounder of the Theosophical Society, went to India in 1879 to sit at the feet of [Swami Dayananda Sarasvati](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sarasvati) (1824–83), whose “back to the [Vedas](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Veda)” reformist Hindu society, the [Arya Samaj](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arya-Samaj), was founded in Bombay in 1875. Dayananda called on Hindus to reject the “corrupting” excrescences of their faith, including [idolatry](https://www.britannica.com/topic/idolatry), the [caste system](https://www.britannica.com/topic/caste-social-differentiation), and infant marriage, and to return to the original purity of Vedic life and thought. The Swami insisted that post-Vedic changes in Hindu society had led only to weakness and disunity, which had destroyed India’s [capacity](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/capacity) to resist foreign invasion and subjugation. His reformist society was to take root most firmly in the Punjab at the start of the 20th century, and it became that province’s leading nationalist organization. Blavatsky soon left Dayananda and established her own “Samaj,” whose Indian headquarters were outside Madras city, at Adyar. [Annie Besant](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Annie-Besant) (1847–1933), the Theosophical Society’s most famous leader, succeeded Blavatsky and became the first and only British woman to serve as president of the Congress Party (1917).

**The early Congress movement**

The first [Congress Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-National-Congress) session, convened in Bombay city on December 28, 1885, was attended by 73 representatives, as well as 10 more unofficial delegates; virtually every province of British India was represented. Fifty-four of the delegates were Hindu, only two were Muslim, and the remainder were mostly [Parsi](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Parsi) and [Jain](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jainism). Practically all the Hindu delegates were [Brahman](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brahman-caste)s. All of them spoke English. More than half were lawyers, and the remainder consisted of journalists, businessmen, landowners, and professors. Such was the first gathering of the new India, an emerging elite of middle-class [intellectuals](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectuals) devoted to peaceful political action and protest on behalf of their nation in the making. On its last day, the Congress passed resolutions, embodying the political and economic demands of its members, that served thereafter as public petitions to government for the redress of grievances. Among those initial resolutions were calls for the addition of elected nonofficial representatives to the supreme and provincial legislative councils and for real equality of opportunity for Indians to enter the ICS by the immediate introduction of simultaneous examinations in India and Britain.

Economic demands by the [Congress](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/Congress) Party started with a call for the reduction of “home charges”—that part of Indian revenue that went toward the entire India Office budget and the pensions of officials living in Britain in retirement. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917), the “grand old man” of the Congress who served three times as its president, was the leading exponent of the popular economic “drain” argument, which offered theoretical support to nationalist politics by insisting that India’s poverty was the product of British exploitation and the annual plunder of gold, silver, and raw materials. Other resolutions called for the reduction of military expenditure, condemned the Third Anglo-Burmese War, demanded retrenchment of administrative expenses, and urged reimposition of import duties on British manufactures.

Hume, who is credited with organizing the Congress Party, attended the first session of the Congress as the only British delegate. Sir William Wedderburn (1838–1918), Gokhale’s closest British adviser and himself later elected twice to serve as president of the Congress, and [William Wordsworth](https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Wordsworth), principal of Elphinstone College, both appeared as observers. Most Britons in India, however, either ignored the Congress Party and its resolutions as the action and demands of a “microscopic minority” of India’s [diverse](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diverse) millions or considered them the rantings of disloyal extremists. Despite the combination of official [disdain](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disdain) and hostility, the Congress quickly won substantial Indian support and within two years had grown to number more than 600 delegates. In 1888, when Viceroy Dufferin on the eve of his departure from India dismissed the Congress Party as “microscopic,” it mustered 1,248 delegates at its annual meeting. Still, British officials continued to dismiss the significance of the Congress, and more than a decade later Viceroy Curzon claimed, perhaps wishfully, that it was “tottering to its fall.” Curzon, however, inadvertently helped to infuse the Congress with unprecedented popularity and militant vitality by his own [arrogance](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/arrogance) and by failing to appreciate the importance of human sympathy in his relentless drive toward greater [efficiency](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/efficiency).

**The first partition of**[**Bengal**](https://www.britannica.com/event/Partition-of-Bengal)

The first partition of Bengal in 1905 brought that province to the brink of open rebellion. The British recognized that Bengal, with some 85 million people, was much too large for a single province and determined that it merited reorganization and intelligent division. The line drawn by Lord Curzon’s government, however, cut through the heart of the [Bengali](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bengali-language)-speaking “nation,” leaving western Bengal’s *bhadralok* (“respectable people”), the intellectual Hindu leadership of Calcutta, tied to the much less politically active [Bihari](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bihari-languages)- and [Oriya](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Odia-language)-speaking Hindus to their north and south. A new Muslim-majority province of Eastern Bengal and [Assam](https://www.britannica.com/place/Assam) was created with its capital at Dacca (now [Dhaka](https://www.britannica.com/place/Dhaka)). The leadership of the Congress Party viewed that partition as an attempt to “divide and rule” and as proof of the government’s [vindictive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vindictive) [antipathy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antipathy) toward the outspoken *bhadralok* intellectuals, especially since Curzon and his subordinates had ignored countless pleas and petitions signed by tens of thousands of Calcutta’s leading citizens. Mother-goddess-worshipping Bengali Hindus believed that partition was nothing less than the vivisection of their “mother province,” and mass protest rallies before and after Bengal’s division on October 16, 1905, attracted millions of people theretofore untouched by politics of any variety.

The new tide of national [sentiment](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sentiment) born in Bengal rose to inundate India in every direction, and “Bande Mataram” (“Hail to Thee Mother”) became the Congress’s [national anthem](https://www.britannica.com/topic/national-anthem), its words taken from *Anandamath*, a popular Bengali novel by [Bankim Chandra Chatterjee](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bankim-Chandra-Chatterjee), and its music composed by Bengal’s greatest poet, [Rabindranath Tagore](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rabindranath-Tagore) (1861–1941). As a reaction against the partition, Bengali Hindus launched an effective boycott of British-made goods and dramatized their resolve to live without foreign cloth by igniting huge bonfires of Lancashire-made textiles. Such bonfires, re-creating ancient Vedic sacrificial altars, aroused Hindus in Poona, Madras, and Bombay to light similar political pyres of protest. Instead of wearing foreign-made cloth, Indians vowed to use only domestic (*swadeshi*) cottons and other clothing made in India. Simple hand-spun and hand-woven [sari](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sari)s became high fashion, first in Calcutta and elsewhere in Bengal and then all across India, and displaced the finest Lancashire garments, which were now viewed as hateful imports. The *swadeshi* movement soon stimulated indigenous enterprise in many fields, from Indian cotton mills to match factories, glassblowing shops, and iron and steel foundries.

Increased demands for national education also swiftly followed partition. Bengali students and professors extended their boycott of British goods to English schools and college classrooms, and politically active Indians began to emulate the so-called “Indian Jesuits”—Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar (1850–82), Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856–95), Tilak, and Gokhale—who were pioneers in the founding of indigenous educational institutions in the [Deccan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Deccan) in the 1880s. The movement for national education spread throughout Bengal, as well as to [Varanasi](https://www.britannica.com/place/Varanasi) (Banaras), where [Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Madan-Mohan-Malaviya) (1861–1946) founded his private Banaras Hindu University in 1910.

One of the last major demands to be added to the platform of the Congress Party in the wake of Bengal’s first partition was swaraj, soon to become the most popular [mantra](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mantra) of Indian nationalism. Swaraj was first [articulated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/articulated), in the presidential address of [Dadabhai Naoroji](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dadabhai-Naoroji), as the Congress’s goal at its Calcutta session in 1906.

**Nationalism in the Muslim community**

While the Congress Party was calling for swaraj in Calcutta, the Muslim League held its first meeting in Dacca. Though the Muslim minority portion of India’s population lagged behind the Hindu majority in uniting to [articulate](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/articulate) nationalist political demands, [Islam](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam) had, since the founding of the [Delhi sultanate](https://www.britannica.com/place/Delhi-sultanate) in 1206, provided Indian Muslims with sufficient doctrinal mortar to unite them as a separate religious [community](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community). The era of effective [Mughal rule](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mughal-dynasty) (*c.* 1556–1707), moreover, gave India’s Muslims a sense of martial and administrative superiority to, as well as a sense of separation from, the Hindu majority.

In 1857 the last of the Mughal emperors had served as a rallying symbol for many mutineers, and in the wake of the mutiny most Britons placed the burden of blame for its inception on the Muslim community. [Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sayyid-Ahmad-Khan) (1817–98), India’s greatest 19th-century Muslim leader, succeeded, in his *Causes of the Indian Revolt* (1873), in convincing many British officials that Hindus were primarily to blame for the mutiny. Sayyid had entered the East India Company’s service in 1838 and was the leader of Muslim India’s emulative mainstream of political reform. He visited [Oxford](https://www.britannica.com/place/Oxford-England) in 1874 and returned to found the Anglo-Muhammadan Oriental College (now Aligarh Muslim University) at [Aligarh](https://www.britannica.com/place/Aligarh) in 1875. It was India’s first centre of Islamic and Western [higher education](https://www.britannica.com/topic/higher-education), with instruction given in English and modeled on Oxford. Aligarh became the intellectual cradle of the Muslim League and Pakistan.

Sayyid Mahdi Ali (1837–1907), popularly known by his title Mohsin al-Mulk, had succeeded Sayyid Ahmad as leader and convened a deputation of some 36 Muslim leaders, headed by the [Aga Khan III](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aga-Khan-III), that in 1906 called on [Lord Minto](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gilbert-John-Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound-4th-earl-of-Minto) (viceroy from 1905–10) to articulate the special national interests of India’s Muslim community. Minto promised that any reforms enacted by his government would safeguard the separate interests of the Muslim community. Separate Muslim electorates, formally inaugurated by the Indian Councils Act of 1909, were thus vouchsafed by viceregal fiat in 1906. Encouraged by the [concession](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concession), the [Aga Khan’s](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Aga-Khan) deputation issued an expanded call during the first meeting of the Muslim League (convened in December 1906 at Dacca) “to protect and advance the political rights and interests of Mussalmans of India.” Other resolutions moved at its first meeting expressed Muslim “loyalty to the British government,” support for the Bengal partition, and condemnation of the boycott movement.

**Reforms of the British Liberals**

In Great Britain the Liberal Party’s electoral victory of 1906 marked the dawn of a new era of reforms for British India. Hampered though he was by the viceroy, Lord Minto, the new secretary of state for India, [John Morley](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Morley-Viscount-Morley), was able to introduce several important [innovations](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/innovations) into the legislative and administrative machinery of the British Indian government. First, he acted to [implement](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/implement) Queen Victoria’s promise of racial equality of opportunity, which since 1858 had served only to assure Indian nationalists of British hypocrisy. He appointed two Indian members to his council at Whitehall: one a Muslim, Sayyid Husain Bilgrami, who had taken an active role in the founding of the Muslim League; and the other a Hindu, Krishna G. Gupta, the senior Indian in the ICS. Morley also persuaded a reluctant Lord Minto to appoint to the viceroy’s executive council the first Indian member, [Satyendra P. Sinha](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Satyendra-Prassano-Sinha-1st-Baron-Sinha-of-Raipur) (1864–1928), in 1909. Sinha (later Lord Sinha) had been admitted to the bar at Lincoln’s Inn in 1886 and was advocate general of Bengal before his appointment as the viceroy’s law member, a position he felt [obliged](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/obliged) to resign in 1910. He was elected president of the Congress Party in 1915 and became parliamentary undersecretary of state for India in 1919 and governor of Bihar and Orissa (now Odisha) in 1920.

Morley’s major reform scheme, the Indian Councils Act of 1909 (popularly called the Morley-Minto Reforms), directly introduced the elective principle to Indian legislative council membership. Though the initial electorate was a minuscule minority of Indians enfranchised by property ownership and education, in 1910 some 135 elected Indian representatives took their seats as members of legislative councils throughout British India. The act of 1909 also increased the maximum additional membership of the supreme council from 16 (to which it had been raised by the Councils Act of 1892) to 60. In the [provincial](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/provincial) councils of Bombay, Bengal, and Madras, which had been created in 1861, the permissible total membership had been raised to 20 by the act of 1892, and that number was increased in 1909 to 50, a majority of whom were to be nonofficial; the number of council members in other provinces was similarly increased.

In abolishing the official majorities of provincial legislatures, Morley was following the advice of Gokhale and other liberal Congress Party leaders, such as Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848–1909), and overriding the bitter opposition of not only the ICS but also his own viceroy and council. Morley believed, as did many other British Liberal politicians, that the only justification for British rule over India was to [bequeath](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bequeath) to the government of India Britain’s greatest political institution, parliamentary government. Minto and his officials in Calcutta and Simla did succeed in watering down the reforms by writing stringent regulations for their implementation and insisting upon the retention of executive veto power over all legislation. Elected members of the new councils were empowered, nevertheless, to engage in spontaneous supplementary questioning, as well as in formal debate with the executive concerning the annual budget. Members were also permitted to introduce legislative proposals of their own.

Gokhale took immediate advantage of the [vital](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/vital) new parliamentary procedures by introducing a measure for free and compulsory [elementary education](https://www.britannica.com/topic/elementary-education) throughout British India. Although defeated, it was brought back again and again by Gokhale, who used the platform of the government’s highest council of state as a sounding board for nationalist demands. Before the act of 1909, as Gokhale told fellow members of the Congress Party in Madras that year, Indian nationalists had been engaged in agitation “from outside,” but “from now,” he said, they would be “engaged in what might be called responsible association with the administration.”

**Moderate and militant nationalism**

In 1907 the Congress Party held its annual meeting in [Surat](https://www.britannica.com/place/Surat), but the assembly, plagued by conflict, never came to order long enough to hear the presidential address of its [moderate](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/moderate) president-elect, Rash Behari Ghose (1845–1921). The division of the Congress reflected broad tactical differences between the liberal evolutionary and militant revolutionary wings of the national organization and those aspiring to the presidency. Young militants of Tilak’s New Party wanted to extend the boycott movement to the entire British government, while moderate leaders like Gokhale cautioned against such “extreme” action, fearing it might lead to violence. Those moderates were attacked by the militants as “traitors” to the “motherland,” and the Congress split into two parties, which would not reunite for nine years. Tilak demanded swaraj as his “birthright,” and his newspaper encouraged the young militants, whose introduction of the cult of the bomb and the gun in [Maharashtra](https://www.britannica.com/place/Maharashtra) and Bengal led to Tilak’s deportation for “sedition” to prison in Mandalay (Burma) from 1908 to 1914. Political violence in Bengal, in the form of terrorist acts, reached its peak from 1908 through 1910, as did the severity of official repression and the number of “preventive detention” arrests. Although Minto continued to [assure](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/assure) Morley that opposition to the partition of Bengal was “dying down,” and although Morley tried to convince his Liberal friends that it was a “settled fact,” the opposite, in fact, was true. Harsher repression seemed only to breed more violent agitation.

Before the end of 1910, Minto finally returned home, and Morley appointed the liberal [Lord Hardinge](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Hardinge-1st-Baron-Hardinge) to succeed him as viceroy (governed 1910–16). Soon after reaching Calcutta, Hardinge recommended the reunification of Bengal, a position accepted by Morley, who also agreed to the new viceroy’s proposal that a separate province of Bihar and Orissa should be carved out of Bengal. [King George V](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-V-king-of-United-Kingdom) journeyed to India for his coronation [durbar](https://www.britannica.com/topic/durbar) (audience) in Delhi, and there, on December 12, 1911, were announced the revocation of the partition of Bengal, the creation of a new province, and the plan to shift the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi’s distant plain. By shifting their capital to the site of great Mughal glory, the British hoped to [placate](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/placate) Bengal’s Muslim minority, now aggrieved at the loss of provincial power in eastern Bengal.

Reunification of Bengal indeed served somewhat to mollify Bengali Hindus, but the downgrading of Calcutta from imperial to mere provincial capital status was simultaneously a blow to *bhadralok* egos and to Calcutta real estate values. Political unrest continued, now attracting Muslim as well as Hindu acts of terrorist violence, and Lord Hardinge himself was nearly assassinated by a bomb thrown into his howdah on top of his viceregal elephant as he entered Delhi in 1912. The [would-be](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/would-be) assassin escaped in the crowd. Later that year [Edwin Samuel Montagu](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edwin-Samuel-Montagu), Morley’s political protégé, who served as parliamentary undersecretary of state for India from 1910 to 1914, announced that the goal of British policy toward India would be to meet the just demands of Indians for a greater share in government. Britain seemed to be awakening to the urgency of India’s political demands just as more compelling problems of European war preempted Whitehall’s attention.

**World War I and its aftermath**

[](https://cdn.britannica.com/13/146313-050-DD9AAC27/India-War-Memorial-arch-New-Delhi-Sir.jpg)

[New Delhi: All India War Memorial arch](https://cdn.britannica.com/13/146313-050-DD9AAC27/India-War-Memorial-arch-New-Delhi-Sir.jpg)

In August 1914 Lord Hardinge announced his government’s entry into [World War I](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I). India’s contributions to the war became extensive and significant, and the war’s contributions to change within British India proved to be even greater. In many ways—politically, economically, and socially—the impact of the conflict was as [pervasive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pervasive) as that of the mutiny of 1857–59.

**India’s contributions to the war effort**

The initial response throughout India to Lord Hardinge’s announcement was, for the most part, enthusiastic support. Indian princes volunteered their men, money, and personal service, while leaders of the Congress Party—from Tilak, who had just been released from Mandalay and had wired the king-emperor vowing his patriotic support, to Gandhi, who toured Indian villages urging peasants to join the British army—were allied in backing the war effort. Only India’s Muslims, many of whom felt a strong religious allegiance to the [Ottoman](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire) caliph that had to be weighed against their temporal devotion to British rule, seemed ambivalent from the war’s inception.

Support from the Congress Party was primarily offered on the assumption that Britain would repay such loyal assistance with substantial political concessions—if not immediate independence or at least dominion status following the war, then surely its promise soon after the [Allies](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Allied-Powers-international-alliance) achieved victory. The government of India’s immediate military support was of vital importance in [bolstering](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bolstering) the [Western Front](https://www.britannica.com/event/Western-Front-World-War-I), and an expeditionary force, including two fully manned infantry divisions and one cavalry division, left India in late August and early September 1914. They were shipped directly to France and moved up to the battered Belgian line just in time for the [First Battle of Ypres](https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Battle-of-Ypres). The Indian Corps sustained extraordinarily heavy losses during the winter campaigns of 1914–15 on the Western Front. The [myth](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth) of Indian racial inferiority, especially with respect to courage in battle, was thus dissolved in sepoy blood on Flanders fields. In 1917 Indians were at last admitted to the final [bastion](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bastion) of British Indian racial discrimination—the ranks of royal commissioned officers.

In the early months of the war, Indian troops also were rushed to [eastern Africa](https://www.britannica.com/place/eastern-Africa) and Egypt, and by the end of 1914 more than 300,000 officers and men of the British Indian Army had been shipped to overseas garrisons and battlefronts. The army’s most ambitious, though ill-managed, campaign was fought in Mesopotamia. In October 1914, before Turkey joined forces with the [Central Powers](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Central-Powers), the government of India launched an army to the mouth of the [Shatt al-Arab](https://www.britannica.com/place/Shatt-Al-Arab) to further Viceroy Curzon’s policy of control over the [Persian Gulf](https://www.britannica.com/place/Persian-Gulf) region. Al-Baṣrah (Basra) was taken easily in December 1914, and by October 1915 the British Indian Army had moved as far north as [Al-Kūt](https://www.britannica.com/place/Al-Kut) (Kūt al-ʿAmārah), barely 100 miles (160 km) from Baghdad. The prize of Baghdad seemed within reach of British arms, but, less than two weeks after Gen. Sir [Charles Townshend’s](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Townshend-British-statesman) doomed army of 12,000 Indians started north in November 1915, they were stopped at Ctesiphon, then forced to fall back to Al-Kūt, which was surrounded by Turks in December and fell in April 1916. That disaster became a national scandal for Britain and led to the immediate resignation of India’s secretary of state, Sir [Austen Chamberlain](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Austen-Chamberlain).

Edwin Montagu, Chamberlain’s successor at Whitehall’s India Office, informed the [British House of Commons](https://www.britannica.com/topic/House-of-Commons-British-government) on August 20, 1917, that the policy of the British government toward India was thereafter to be one of “increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration…with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an [integral](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integral) part of the Empire.” Soon after that stirring promise of political reward for India’s wartime support, Montagu embarked upon a personal tour of India. During his tour, Montagu conferred with his new viceroy, [Lord Chelmsford](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederic-John-Napier-Thesiger-1st-Viscount-Chelmsford) (governed 1916–21), and their lengthy deliberations bore fruit in the [Montagu-Chelmsford Report](https://www.britannica.com/event/Montagu-Chelmsford-Report) of 1918, the theoretical basis for the Government of India Act of 1919.

**Anti-British activity**

Anti-British terrorist activity started soon after the war began, sparked by the return to India of hundreds of embittered [Sikh](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sikhism)s who had sought to emigrate from their [Punjab](https://www.britannica.com/place/Punjab-state-India) homes to Canada but who were [denied](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/denied) permission to disembark in that country because of their colour. As British subjects, the Sikhs had assumed they would gain entry to underpopulated Canada, but, after wretched months aboard an old Japanese freighter (the *Komagata Maru*) in cramped and unsanitary conditions with inadequate food supplies, they returned to India as confirmed revolutionaries. Leaders of the [Ghadr](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ghadr) (“Revolution”) party, which had been started by Punjabi Sikhs in 1913, journeyed abroad in search of arms and money to support their revolution, and [Lala Har Dayal](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lala-Har-Dayal), the party’s foremost leader, went to Berlin to solicit aid from the Central Powers.

Muslim disaffection also grew and acquired revolutionary dimensions as the Mesopotamian campaign dragged on. Many Indian Muslims appealed to [Afghanistan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan) for aid and urged the emir to start a [holy war](https://www.britannica.com/topic/holy-war) against the British and in defense of the caliphate. After the war the [Khilafat movement](https://www.britannica.com/event/Khilafat-movement), an offspring of growing pan-Islamic [consciousness](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness) in India, was started by two fiery orator-journalists, the brothers Shaukat and Muhammad Ali. It lured thousands of Muslim peasants to abandon their village homes and trudge over frozen high passes in a disastrous *hijrat* (“flight”) from India to Afghanistan. In Bengal, terrorist bombings continued to harass officials, despite numerous “preventive detention” arrests made by Indian Criminal Intelligence Division police under the tough martial-law edicts [promulgated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/promulgated) at the war’s inception.

The deaths of Gokhale and of the Bombay political leader [Sir Pherozeshah Mehta](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pherozeshah-Mehta) in 1915 removed the most powerful moderate leadership from the Congress Party and cleared the way for Tilak’s return to power in that organization after its reunification in 1916 at Lucknow. That historic session in December 1916 brought even greater unity to India’s nationalist forces, as the Congress and the Muslim League agreed to a pact outlining their joint program of immediate national demands. The [Lucknow Pact](https://www.britannica.com/event/Lucknow-Pact) called first of all for the creation of expanded provincial legislative councils, four-fifths of whose members should be elected directly by the people on as broad a franchise as possible. The league’s readiness to unite with the Congress Party was attributed to the pact’s stipulation that Muslims should receive a far higher proportion of separate electorate seats in all legislative councils than they had enjoyed under the act of 1909. Thanks to such generous [concessions](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concessions) of political power by the Congress, Muslim leaders, including [Mohammad Ali Jinnah](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohammed-Ali-Jinnah) (1876–1949), agreed to set aside doctrinal differences and work with the Congress toward the attainment of national freedom from British rule. That rapprochement between the Congress Party and the Muslim League was short-lived, however, and by 1917 communal tensions and disagreements once again dominated India’s faction-ridden political scene. Tilak and Annie Besant each campaigned for different home-rule leagues, while Muslims worried more about pan-Islamic problems than all-India questions of unity.

**The postwar years**

By [Armistice Day](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Veterans-Day), November 11, 1918, more than a million Indian troops had been shipped overseas to fight or serve as noncombatants behind the Allied lines on every major front from France to Gallipoli in European Turkey. Nearly 150,000 Indian battle [casualties](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/casualties), more than 36,000 of them fatal, were sustained during the war. India’s material and financial contributions to the war effort included the shipment of vast amounts of military stores and equipment to various fronts and nearly five million tons of wheat to Great Britain; also supplied by India were raw jute, cotton goods, rough-tanned hides, tungsten (wolfram), manganese, mica, saltpetre, timbers, silk, rubber, and various oils. The government of India paid for all its troops overseas, and, before the war ended, the viceroy presented a gift of £100 million (actually an imperial tax) to the British government. The Tata Iron and Steel Company received Indian government support once the war started and by 1916 was producing 100,000 tons of steel per year. An industrial commission was appointed in 1916 to survey the subcontinent’s industrial resources and potential, and in 1917 a munitions board was created to expedite the production of war matériel. Wartime inflation was immediately followed by one of India’s worst economic depressions, which came in the wake of the devastating [influenza epidemic of 1918–19](https://www.britannica.com/event/influenza-pandemic-of-1918-1919), a [pandemic](https://www.britannica.com/science/pandemic) that took a far heavier [toll](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/toll) of Indian life and resources than all of the casualties sustained throughout the war. (Indians accounted for roughly half of the pandemic’s total deaths worldwide.)

Politically, the postwar years proved equally depressing and frustrating to India’s great expectations. British officials, who in the first flush of patriotism had abandoned their ICS posts to rush to the front, returned to oust the Indian subordinates acting in their stead and carried on their prewar jobs as though nothing had changed in British India. Indian soldiers also returned from battlefronts to find that back home they were no longer treated as [invaluable](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/invaluable) allies but reverted immediately to the status of “natives.” Most of the soldiers recruited during the war had come from the [Punjab](https://www.britannica.com/place/Punjab-state-India), which, with less than one-tenth of India’s population, had supplied as many as half of the combatant troops shipped abroad. It is thus hardly surprising that the flash point of postwar violence that shook India in the spring of 1919 was Punjab province.

The issue that served to rally millions of Indians, arousing them to a new level of disaffection from British rule, was the government of India’s hasty passage of the [Rowlatt Acts](https://www.britannica.com/event/Rowlatt-Acts) early in 1919. Those “black acts,” as they came to be called, were peacetime [extensions](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/extensions) of the wartime emergency measures passed in 1915 and had been rammed through the Supreme Legislative Council over the unanimous opposition of its Indian members, several of whom, including Jinnah, resigned in protest. Jinnah wrote to Viceroy Lord Chelmsford that the enactment of such autocratic legislation, following the victorious conclusion of a war in which India had so loyally supported Britain, was an unwarranted uprooting of the “fundamental principles of justice” and a gross violation of the “constitutional rights of the people.”

[Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahatma-Gandhi), the [Gujarati](https://www.britannica.com/place/Gujarat) barrister who had returned from living for many years in [South Africa](https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Africa) shortly after the war started, was recognized throughout India as one of the most-promising leaders of the Congress Party. He called on all Indians to take sacred vows to disobey the Rowlatt Acts and launched a nationwide movement for the [repeal](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/repeal) of those repressive measures. Gandhi’s appeal received the strongest popular response in the Punjab, where the nationalist leaders Kichloo and Satyapal addressed mass protest rallies both from the provincial capital of [Lahore](https://www.britannica.com/place/Lahore) and from [Amritsar](https://www.britannica.com/place/Amritsar), sacred capital of the Sikhs. Gandhi himself had taken a train to the Punjab early in April 1919 to address one of those rallies, but he was arrested at the border station and taken back to Bombay by orders of Punjab’s lieutenant governor, Sir Michael O’Dwyer. On April 10, Kichloo and Satyapal were arrested in Amritsar and deported from the district by Deputy Commissioner Miles Irving. When their followers tried to march to Irving’s bungalow in the camp to demand the release of their leaders, they were fired on by British troops. With several of their number killed and [wounded](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/wounded), the enraged mob rioted through Amritsar’s old city, burning British banks, murdering several Britons, and attacking two British women. [Gen. Reginald Edward Harry Dyer](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Reginald-Edward-Harry-Dyer) was sent from [Jalandhar](https://www.britannica.com/place/Jalandhar) (Jullundur) with Gurkha ([Nepalese](https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal)) and [Balochi](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baloch) troops to restore order.

[**Jallianwala Bagh Massacre**](https://www.britannica.com/event/Jallianwala-Bagh-Massacre)**at Amritsar**

[](https://cdn.britannica.com/18/155918-050-82604C29/Portion-wall-bullet-marks-Jallianwalla-Bagh-Amritsar-April-13-1919.jpg)

[Massacre of Amritsar site](https://cdn.britannica.com/18/155918-050-82604C29/Portion-wall-bullet-marks-Jallianwalla-Bagh-Amritsar-April-13-1919.jpg)

Soon after [Dyer](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Reginald-Edward-Harry-Dyer)’s arrival, on the afternoon of April 13, 1919, some 10,000 or more unarmed men, women, and children gathered in Amritsar’s Jallianwala Bagh (*bagh* means “garden” but since before 1919 the site was a public square), despite a ban on public assemblies. It was a Sunday, and many neighbouring village peasants had also come to Amritsar to celebrate the spring Baisakhi festival. Dyer positioned his men at the sole, narrow passageway of the Bagh, which was otherwise entirely enclosed by the backs of abutted brick buildings. Giving no word of warning, he ordered 50 soldiers to fire into the gathering, and for 10 to 15 minutes about 1,650 rounds of ammunition were unloaded into the screaming, terrified crowd, some of whom were trampled by those desperately trying to escape. According to official estimates, nearly 400 civilians were killed, and another 1,200 were left wounded with no medical attention. Dyer, who argued that his action was necessary to produce a “moral and widespread effect,” admitted that the firing would have continued had more ammunition been available.

The governor of the Punjab province supported the [massacre](https://www.britannica.com/event/Jallianwala-Bagh-Massacre) and, on April 15, placed the entire province under [martial law](https://www.britannica.com/topic/martial-law). Viceroy Chelmsford, however, characterized the action as “an error of judgment,” and, when Secretary of State Montagu learned of the slaughter, he appointed a commission of inquiry, headed by Lord Hunter. Although Dyer was subsequently relieved of his command, he returned a hero to many in Britain, especially [conservatives](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservatives), and in Parliament members of the [House of Lords](https://www.britannica.com/topic/House-of-Lords) presented him with a jeweled sword inscribed “Saviour of the Punjab.”

The Massacre of Amritsar turned millions of moderate Indians from patient and loyal supporters of the British raj into nationalists who would never again place trust in British “fair play.” It thus marks the turning point for a majority of the Congress’s supporters from moderate cooperation with the raj and its promised reforms to revolutionary noncooperation. Liberal Anglophile leaders, such as Jinnah, were soon to be displaced by the followers of Gandhi, who would launch, a year after that dreadful massacre, the noncooperation movement, his first nationwide *satyagraha* (“holding on to truth”) nonviolent campaign as India’s revolutionary response.

[**Gandhi**](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahatma-Gandhi)**’s philosophy and strategy**

For Gandhi, there was no [dichotomy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dichotomy) between religion and politics, and his unique political power was in great measure attributable to the spiritual leadership he exerted over India’s masses, who viewed him as a [sadhu](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sadhu) (holy man) and revered him as a mahatma (which in Sanskrit means “great soul”). He chose *satya* (“truth”) and [ahimsa](https://www.britannica.com/topic/ahimsa) (nonviolence, or love) as the polar stars of his political movement; the former was the ancient Vedic concept of the real, embodying the very essence of existence itself, while the latter, according to Hindu (as well as Jain) scripture, was the highest religion ([dharma](https://www.britannica.com/topic/dharma-religious-concept)). With those two weapons, Gandhi assured his followers, unarmed India could bring the mightiest empire known to history to its knees. His mystic faith magnetized millions, and the sacrificial suffering (*tapasya*) that he took upon himself by the purity of his chaste life and prolonged fasting armed him with great powers. Gandhi’s strategy for bringing the giant machine of British rule to a halt was to call upon Indians to boycott all British-made goods, British schools and colleges, British courts of law, British titles and honours, British elections and elective offices, and, should the need arise if all other [boycotts](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/boycotts) failed, British tax collectors as well. The total withdrawal of Indian support would thus stop the machine, and nonviolent noncooperation would achieve the national goal of swaraj.

The Muslim quarter of India’s population could hardly be expected to respond any more enthusiastically to Gandhi’s [satyagraha](https://www.britannica.com/topic/satyagraha-philosophy) call than they had to Tilak’s revivalism, but Gandhi laboured valiantly to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity by embracing the Ali brothers’ [Khilafat movement](https://www.britannica.com/event/Khilafat-movement) as the “premier plank” of his national program. Launched in response to the dismemberment of the [Ottoman Empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire) after World War I, the Khilafat movement coincided with the inception of satyagraha, thus giving the [illusion](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/illusion) of unity to India’s nationalist agitation. Such unity, however, proved as chimerical as the Khilafat movement’s hope of preserving the caliphate itself, and in December 1920 [Mohammed Ali Jinnah](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohammed-Ali-Jinnah), alienated by Gandhi’s mass following of Hindi-speaking Hindus, left the Congress Party session at Nagpur. The days of the Lucknow Pact were over, and by the start of 1921 the antipathetic forces of revivalist Hindu and Muslim agitation, destined to lead to the birth of the independent dominions of India and Pakistan in 1947, were thus clearly set in motion in their separate directions.

**Prelude to independence, 1920–47**

The last quarter century of the British raj was racked by increasingly violent Hindu-Muslim conflict and intensified agitation demanding Indian independence. British officials in London, as well as in [New Delhi](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Delhi) (the new capital city of British India) and Simla, tried in vain to stem the rising tide of popular opposition to their raj by offering tidbits of [constitutional](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitutional) reform, which proved to be either too little to satisfy both the Congress Party and the Muslim League or too late to avert disaster. More than a century of British technological, institutional, and ideological unification of the South Asian subcontinent thus ended after [World War II](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II) with communal civil war, mass migration, and partition.

**Constitutional reforms**

British politicians and bureaucrats tried to cure India’s ailing [body politic](https://www.britannica.com/topic/body-politic) with periodic infusions of constitutional reform. The separate electorate formula introduced for Muslims in the Government of India Act of 1909 (the [Morley-Minto Reforms](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-Councils-Act-of-1909)) was expanded and applied to other minorities in the Government of India Acts (1919 and 1935). Sikhs and Christians, for example, were given special privileges in voting for their own representatives comparable to those vouchsafed to Muslims. The British raj thus sought to [reconcile](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reconcile) Indian religious [pluralism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pluralism) to representative rule and no doubt hoped, in the process of fashioning such elaborate constitutional formulas, to win undying minority support for themselves and to undermine the arguments of Congress’s radical leadership that they alone spoke for India’s “united nationalist movement.” Earlier official support of, and appeals to, India’s princes and great landowners (*see* [zamindar](https://www.britannica.com/topic/zamindar)) had proved fruitful, especially since the inception of the crown raj in 1858, and more concerted efforts were made in 1919 and 1935 to wean minorities and India’s educated elite away from revolution and noncooperation.

The Government of India Act of 1919 (also known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms) was based on the [Montagu-Chelmsford Report](https://www.britannica.com/event/Montagu-Chelmsford-Report) that had been submitted to Parliament in 1918. Under the act, elections were held in 1920, the number of Indian members to the viceroy’s Executive Council was increased from at least two to no fewer than three, and the [Imperial](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/Imperial) Legislative Council was transformed into a [bicameral legislature](https://www.britannica.com/topic/bicameral-system) consisting of a [Legislative Assembly](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Legislative-Assembly-France-1791-1792) (lower house) and a Council of State (upper house). The Legislative Assembly, with 145 members, was to have a majority of 104 elected, while 33 of the Council of State’s 60 members were also to be elected. Enfranchisement continued to be based on property ownership and education, but under the act of 1919 the total number of Indians eligible to vote for representatives to provincial councils was expanded to five million; just one-fifth of that number, however, were permitted to vote for Legislative Assembly candidates, and only about 17,000 elite were allowed to choose Council of State members. [Dyarchy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/dyarchy) (dual governance) was to be introduced at the provincial level, where executive councils were divided between ministers elected to preside over “transferred” departments (education, [public health](https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-health), public works, and agriculture) and officials appointed by the governor to rule over “reserved” departments (land revenue, justice, police, irrigation, and labour).

The Government of India Act of 1935 gave all provinces full representative and elective governments, chosen by franchise extended now to some 30 million Indians, and only the most crucial portfolios—defense, revenue, and foreign affairs—were “reserved” to appointed officials. The viceroy and his governors retained veto powers over any legislation they considered unacceptable, but prior to the 1937 elections they reached a “gentleman’s agreement” with the Congress Party’s high command not to resort to that constitutional option, which was their last vestige of autocracy. The act of 1935 was also to have introduced a federation of British India’s provinces and the still [autonomous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomous) princely states, but that institutional union of representative and despotic rule was never realized, since the princes were unable to agree among themselves on matters of [protocol](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/protocol).

The act of 1935 was itself the product of the three elaborate sessions of the [Round Table Conference](https://www.britannica.com/event/Round-Table-Conference), held in London, and at least five years of [bureaucratic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bureaucratic) labour, most of which bore little fruit. The first session—attended by 58 delegates from British India, 16 from the British Indian states, and 16 from British political parties—was convened by Prime Minister [Ramsay MacDonald](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ramsay-MacDonald) in the [City of Westminster](https://www.britannica.com/place/City-of-Westminster), London, in November 1930. While Jinnah and the [Aga Khan III](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aga-Khan-III) led among the British Indian delegation a deputation of 16 Muslims, no Congress Party deputation joined the first session, as Gandhi and his leading lieutenants were all in jail at the time. Without the Congress the [Round Table](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Round-Table-Arthurian-legend) could hardly hope to fashion any popularly meaningful reforms, so Gandhi was released from prison before the second session started in September 1931. At his own insistence, however, he [attended](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/attended) it as the Congress’s sole representative. Little was accomplished at the second session, for Hindu-Muslim differences remained unresolved and the princes continued to argue with one another. The third session, which began in November 1932, was more the product of official British inertia than any proof of progress in closing the tragic gaps between so many Indian minds reflected in earlier debate. Two new provinces emerged, however, from those official deliberations. In the east [Orissa](https://www.britannica.com/place/Odisha) was established as a province distinct from [Bihar](https://www.britannica.com/place/Bihar), and in the west Sind ([Sindh](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sindh-province-Pakistan)) was separated from the Bombay Presidency and became the first Muslim-majority governor’s province of British India since the reunification of [Bengal](https://www.britannica.com/place/Bengal-region-Asia). It was decided that Burma should be a separate colony from British India.

In August 1932 Prime Minister MacDonald announced his [Communal Award](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Communal-Award), Great Britain’s [unilateral](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/unilateral) attempt to resolve the various conflicts among India’s many communal interests. The award, which was later incorporated into the act of 1935, expanded the separate-electorate formula reserved for Muslims to other minorities, including Sikhs, Indian Christians (*see* [Thomas Christians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thomas-Christians)), Anglo-Indians, Europeans, distinct regional groups (such as the Marathas in the Bombay Presidency), and special interests (women, [organized labour](https://www.britannica.com/topic/organized-labor), business, landowners, and universities). The Congress Party was, predictably, unhappy at the extension of communal representation but became particularly outraged at the British offer of separate-electorate seats for “depressed classes,” meaning the so-called “[untouchables](https://www.britannica.com/topic/untouchable).” Gandhi undertook a “fast unto death” against that offer, which he viewed as a [nefarious](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nefarious) British plot to wean more than 50 million Hindus away from their higher-caste brothers and sisters. Gandhi, who called the untouchables “Children of God” (Harijans), agreed after prolonged personal negotiations with [Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bhimrao-Ramji-Ambedkar) (1891–1956), a leader of the untouchables, to reserve many more seats for them than the British had promised, as long as they remained within the “Hindu” majority fold. Thus, the offer of separate-electorate seats for the untouchables was withdrawn.

**The Congress’s ambivalent strategy**

Gandhi, promising his followers freedom in just one year, launched the [noncooperation movement](https://www.britannica.com/event/noncooperation-movement) on August 1, 1920, which he believed would bring the British raj to a grinding halt. After more than a year, and even with 60,000 satyagrahis in prison cells across British India, the raj remained firm, and, therefore, Gandhi prepared to unleash his last and most powerful [boycott](https://www.britannica.com/topic/boycott) weapon—calling upon the peasants of Bardoli in [Gujarat](https://www.britannica.com/place/Gujarat) to [boycott](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/boycott) land taxes. In February 1922, on the eve of that final phase of boycott, word reached Gandhi that in [Chauri Chaura](https://www.britannica.com/place/Chauri-Chaura), [United Provinces](https://www.britannica.com/place/Dutch-Republic) (now in [Uttar Pradesh](https://www.britannica.com/place/Uttar-Pradesh) state), 22 Indian police were massacred in their police station by a mob of satyagrahis, who set fire to the station and prevented the trapped police from escaping immolation. Gandhi announced that he had committed a “Himalayan blunder” in launching satyagraha without sufficient “soul-cleansing” of India’s masses and, as a result, called a halt to the noncooperation movement campaign. He was subsequently arrested, however, and found guilty of “promoting disaffection” toward the raj, for hich he was sentenced to six years in prison.

While Gandhi was behind bars, [Motilal Nehru](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Motilal-Nehru) (1861–1931), one of northern India’s wealthiest lawyers, started within Congress a new politically active “party,” the [Swaraj Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Swaraj-Party). Motilal Nehru shared the lead of the new party with [C.R. (Chitta Ranjan) Das](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chitta-Ranjan-Das) (1870–1925) of Bengal. Contesting the elections to the new Central Legislative Assembly in 1923, the party sought by antigovernment agitation within the council chambers to disrupt official policy and derail the raj. Though Gandhian noncooperation remained the Congress Party’s primary strategy, actual partial cooperation in the postwar reforms thus became the alternate tactic of those Congress leaders who were less orthodox Hindu, or more secular-minded, in outlook. The Swarajists won more than 48 out of 105 seats in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1923, but their numbers were never quite enough to prevent the British from passing the legislation they desired or believed was needed to maintain internal “order.”

Gandhi was released from jail in February 1924, four years before his term was finished, after a surgery. Thereafter he focused on what he called his “constructive program” of hand spinning and weaving and overall village “uplift,” as well as on Hindu “purification” in seeking to advance the cause of the Harijans, especially through granting them entry to Hindu temples, from which they had always been banished. Gandhi himself lived in village [ashram](https://www.britannica.com/topic/ashrama)s (religious retreats), which served more as models for his socioeconomic ideals than as centres of political power, though the leaders of the Congress flocked to his remote rural retreats for periodic consultation on strategy.

In many ways Congress policy remained plagued by [ambivalence](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambivalence) for the remaining years of the raj. Most members of the high command aligned with Gandhi, but others sought what seemed to them more practical or [pragmatic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pragmatic) solutions to India’s problems, which so often [transcended](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transcended) political or imperial-colonial questions. It was always easier, of course, for Indian leaders to rally the masses behind emotional religious appeals or anti-British [rhetoric](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetoric) than to resolve problems that had festered throughout the Indian subcontinent for millennia. Most Hindu-Muslim differences, therefore, remained unresolved, even as the Hindu [caste system](https://www.britannica.com/topic/caste-social-differentiation) was never really attacked or dismantled by the Congress.

Imperial economic exploitation, however, did prove to be an excellent nationalist catalyst—as, for example, when Gandhi mobilized the peasant masses of India’s population behind the Congress Party during his famous [Salt March](https://www.britannica.com/event/Salt-March) against the salt tax in March–April 1930, which was the prelude to his second nationwide satyagraha. The British government’s monopoly on the sale of salt, which was heavily taxed, had long been a major source of revenue to the raj, and, by marching from his ashram at Sabarmati near [Ahmadabad](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ahmadabad) (now in Gujarat state) to the sea at Dandi, where he illegally picked up salt from the sands on the shore, Gandhi mobilized millions of Indians to follow him in thus breaking the law. It was an ingeniously simple way to break a British law nonviolently, and before year’s end jail cells throughout India were again filled with satyagrahis.

Many of the younger members of the Congress Party were eager to take up arms against the British, and some considered Gandhi an agent of imperial rule for having called a halt to the first satyagraha in 1922. Most famous and popular of the militant Congress leaders was [Subhas Chandra Bose](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Subhas-Chandra-Bose) (1897–1945) of Bengal. Bose was so popular within Congress that he was elected its president twice (in 1938 and 1939) over Gandhi’s opposition and the active opposition of most members of its central working committee. After being forced to resign the office in April 1939, Bose organized with his brother Sarat his own Bengali party, the Forward Bloc, which initially remained within the Congress fold. At the beginning of World War II, Bose was arrested and detained by the British, but in 1941 he escaped their [surveillance](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/surveillance) and fled to Afghanistan, thence to the [Soviet Union](https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union) and Germany, where he remained until 1943.

[Jawaharlal Nehru](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jawaharlal-Nehru) (1889–1964), Motilal’s only son, emerged as Gandhi’s designated successor to the Congress Party’s leadership during the 1930s. A [Fabian socialist](https://www.britannica.com/event/Fabianism) and a barrister, the younger Nehru was educated at [Harrow School](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Harrow-School), London, and at [Trinity College](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Trinity-College-Hartford-Connecticut), Cambridge, and was drawn into the Congress and the noncooperation movement by his admiration for Gandhi. Though Jawaharlal Nehru personally was more of an Anglophile aristocrat than a Hindu sadhu or mahatma, he devoted his energies and intellect to the nationalist movement and, at age 41, was the youngest elected president of the Congress in December 1929, when it passed its Purna Swaraj (“Complete Self-Rule”) resolution. Jawaharlal’s radical brilliance and energy made him a natural leader of the Congress Party’s youth movement, while his Brahman birth and family fortune overcame many of that party’s more [conservative](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservative) leadership’s misgivings about placing him at the Congress’s helm. The Purna Swaraj resolution—proclaimed on January 26, 1930, later to be celebrated as independent India’s Republic Day—called for “complete freedom from the British” but was later interpreted by Prime Minister Nehru as permitting India to remain within the [British Commonwealth](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-association-of-states), a practical concession young Jawaharlal had often vowed he would never make.

**Muslim separatism**

The Muslim quarter of India’s population became increasingly wary of the Congress Party’s promises and restive in the wake of the collapse of the Khilafat movement, which occurred after [Kemal Atatürk](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kemal-Ataturk) announced his modernist Turkish reforms in 1923 and disavowed the very title of [caliph](https://www.britannica.com/topic/caliph) the following year. Hindu-Muslim riots along the southwestern [Malabar Coast](https://www.britannica.com/place/Malabar-Coast) claimed hundreds of lives in 1924, and similar religious rioting spread to every major city in northern India, wherever rumours of Muslim “cow slaughter,” the polluting appearance of a dead pig’s carcass in a mosque, or other clashing doctrinal fears ignited the tinder of distrust ever lurking in the poorer sections of India’s towns and villages. At each stage of reform, as the prospects of real devolution of political power by the British seemed more [imminent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imminent), separate-electorate formulas and leaders of various parties stirred hopes, which proved almost as dangerous in triggering violence as did fears. The older, more conservative leadership of the pre-World War I Congress Party found Gandhian satyagraha too radical—moreover, far too revolutionary—to support, and liberals like [Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tej-Bahadur-Sapru) (1875–1949) organized their own party (eventually to become the National Liberal Federation), while others, like [Jinnah](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohammed-Ali-Jinnah), dropped out of political life entirely. Jinnah, alienated by Gandhi and his illiterate mass of devoutly Hindu [disciples](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disciples), instead devoted himself to his lucrative Bombay law practice, but his energy and ambition lured him back to the leadership of the Muslim League, which he revitalized in the 1930s. Jinnah, who was also instrumental in urging Viceroy [Lord Irwin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Frederick-Lindley-Wood-1st-earl-of-Halifax) (later 1st Earl Halifax; governed 1926–31) and Prime Minister MacDonald to [convene](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/convene) the Round Table Conference in London, was urged by many Muslim compatriots—including [Liaquat Ali Khan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Liaquat-Ali-Khan), Pakistan’s first prime minister (1947–51)—to become the permanent president of the Muslim League.

By 1930 a number of Indian Muslims had begun to think in terms of separate statehood for their minority community, whose population dominated the northwestern provinces of British India and the eastern half of Bengal, as well as important pockets of the United Provinces and the great princely state of [Kashmir](https://www.britannica.com/place/Kashmir-region-Indian-subcontinent). (The princely state of [Hyderabad](https://www.britannica.com/place/Hyderabad-historical-state-India) in the south was ruled by a Muslim [dynasty](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dynasty) but was mostly Hindu.) One of Punjab’s greatest Urdu poets, [Sir Muḥammad Iqbāl](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammad-Iqbal) (1877–1938), while presiding over the Muslim League’s annual meeting in [Allahabad](https://www.britannica.com/place/Prayagraj) in 1930, proposed that “the final destiny” of India’s Muslims should be to consolidate a “North-West Indian Muslim state.” Although he did not name it Pakistan, his proposal included what became the major provinces of modern Pakistan—Punjab, Sindh, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (until 2010 North-West Frontier Province), and Balochistan. Jinnah, the Aga Khan, and other important Muslim leaders were at the time in London attending the Round Table Conference, which still [envisaged](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/envisaged) a single federation of all Indian provinces and princely states as the best possible constitutional solution for India in the aftermath of a future British withdrawal. Separate electorate seats, as well as special guarantees of Muslim “autonomy” or “veto powers” in dealing with sensitive religious issues, were hoped to be sufficient to avert civil war or any need for actual partition. As long as the British raj remained in control, such formulas and schemes appeared to [suffice](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suffice), for the British army could always be hurled into the communal fray at the brink of extreme danger, and the army had as yet remained apolitical and—since its post-mutiny reorganization—untainted by communal religious passions.

In 1933 a group of Muslim students at Cambridge, led by Choudhary Rahmat Ali, proposed that the only acceptable solution to Muslim India’s internal conflicts and problems would be the birth of a Muslim “fatherland,” to be called [Pakistan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Pakistan) (Persian: “Land of the Pure”), out of the Muslim-majority northwestern and northeastern provinces. The Muslim League and its president, Jinnah, did not join in the Pakistan demand until after the league’s famous Lahore meeting in March 1940, as Jinnah, a [secular](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secular) constitutionalist by [predilection](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/predilection) and training, continued to hope for a reconciliation with the Congress Party. Such hopes virtually disappeared, however, when Nehru refused to permit the league to form coalition ministries with the Congress majority in the United Provinces and elsewhere after the 1937 elections. The Congress had initially entered the elections with the hope of wrecking the act of 1935, but—after it had won so impressive a victory in most provinces and the league had done so poorly, mostly because it had inadequately organized itself for nationwide elections—Nehru agreed to participate in the government and insisted there were but “two parties” in India, the Congress and the British raj.

Jinnah soon proved to Nehru that the Muslims were indeed a [formidable](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/formidable) “third” party. The years from 1937 to 1939, when the [Congress Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-National-Congress) actually ran most of British India’s provincial governments, became the seed period for the [Muslim League](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Muslim-League)’s growth in popularity and power within the entire Muslim community, for many Muslims soon viewed the new “Hindu raj” as [biased](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/biased) and tyrannical and the Hindu-led Congress ministries and their helpers as insensitive to Muslim demands or appeals for jobs, as well as to their redress of grievances. The Congress’s partiality toward its own members, [prejudice](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prejudice) toward its majority community, and jobbery for its leadership’s friends and relations all conspired to convince many Muslims that they had become second-class citizens in a land that, while perhaps on the verge of achieving “freedom” for some Indians, would be run by “infidels” and “enemies” to the Muslim minority. The league made the most of the Congress’s errors of judgment in governance; by documenting as many reports as it could gather in papers published during 1939, it hoped to prove how [wretched](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/wretched) a Muslim’s life would be under any “Hindu raj.” The Congress’s high command insisted, of course, that it was a “secular and national” party, not a sectarian Hindu organization, but Jinnah and the Muslim League responded that they alone could speak for and defend the rights of India’s Muslims. Thus, the lines of battle were drawn by the eve of World War II, which served only to intensify and accelerate the process of communal conflict and irreversible political division that would split British India.

**The impact of World War II**

On September 3, 1939, the viceroy [Lord Linlithgow](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Victor-Alexander-John-Hope-2nd-Marquess-of-Linlithgow) (governed 1936–43) informed India’s political leaders and populace that they were at war with Germany. For Nehru and the Congress Party’s high command, such unilateral declarations were viewed as more than insensitive British behaviour, for, in undertaking to run most of British India’s provinces, the Congress thought of itself as the viceroy’s “partner” in administering the raj. What a “betrayal,” therefore, that autocratic declaration of war was judged, and how angry it made Nehru and Gandhi feel. Instead of offering loyal support to the British raj, they demanded a prior forthright statement of Britain’s postwar “goals and ideals.” Neither Linlithgow nor Lord Zetland, his Tory secretary of state, was prepared, however, to pander to the Congress’s wishes at Great Britain’s darkest hour of national danger. Nehru’s outrage helped convince the Congress’s high command to call on all its provincial ministries to resign. Jinnah was overjoyed at that decision and proclaimed Friday, December 22, 1939, a Muslim “Day of Deliverance” from the [tyranny](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tyranny) of the Congress “raj.” Jinnah met regularly with Linlithgow, moreover, and assured the viceroy that he need not fear a lack of support from India’s Muslims, many of whom were active members of Britain’s armed services. Throughout World War II, as the Congress Party moved farther from the British, with first passive and later active noncooperation, the Muslim League in every possible way quietly supported the war effort.

The first meeting of the league after the outbreak of the war was held in Punjab’s ancient capital of Lahore in March 1940. The famous Lahore Resolution, later known as the Pakistan Resolution, was passed by the largest gathering of league delegates just one day after Jinnah informed his followers that “the problem of India is not of an inter-communal but manifestly of an international character.” The league resolved, therefore, that any future constitutional plan proposed by the British for India would not be “acceptable to the Muslims” unless it was so designed that the Muslim-majority “areas” of India’s “North-Western and Eastern Zones” were “grouped to [constitute](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitute) ‘independent States’ in which the [constituent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constituent) units shall be autonomous and sovereign.” Pakistan was not mentioned until the next day’s newspapers introduced that word in their headlines, and Jinnah explained that the resolution [envisioned](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/envisioned) the establishment of not two separately administered Muslim countries but rather a single Muslim nation-state—namely, Pakistan.

[Gandhi](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahatma-Gandhi) launched his first “individual satyagraha” campaign against the war in October 1940. [Vinoba Bhave](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vinoba-Bhave), Gandhi’s foremost disciple, publicly proclaimed his intent to resist the war effort and was subsequently sentenced to three months in jail. [Jawaharlal Nehru](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jawaharlal-Nehru), who was the next to openly disobey British law, was sentenced to four years behind bars. By June 1941 more than 20,000 Congress satyagrahis were in prisons.

It was also in 1941 that Bose fled to Germany, where he started broadcasting appeals to India [urging](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/urging) the masses to “rise up” against British “tyranny” and to “throw off” their chains. There were, however, few Indians in Germany, and Hitler’s advisers urged Bose to go back to Asia by submarine. He was eventually transported to Japan and then to [Singapore](https://www.britannica.com/place/Singapore), where Japan had captured at least 40,000 Indian troops during its takeover of that strategic island in February 1942. The captured soldiers became Netaji (“Leader”) Bose’s Indian National Army (INA) in 1943 and, a year later, marched behind him to Rangoon. Bose hoped to “liberate” first [Manipur](https://www.britannica.com/place/Manipur) and then Bengal from British rule, but the British forces at India’s eastern gateways held until the summer monsoon gave them [respite](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/respite) enough to be properly reinforced and drove Bose and his army back down the [Malay Peninsula](https://www.britannica.com/place/Malay-Peninsula). In August 1945 Bose escaped by air from Saigon (now [Ho Chi Minh City](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ho-Chi-Minh-City), Vietnam), but he died of severe burns after his overloaded plane crashed onto the island of Formosa ([Taiwan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan)).

**British wartime strategy**

Lord Linlithgow’s initial refusal to discuss postwar ideals with the Congress Party left India’s premier national party without an opportunity for constructive debate about any political prospects—that is, other than those it could win by noncooperation or through violence. However, after Japan joined the Axis powers in late 1941 and moved with such rapidity into most of Southeast Asia, Britain feared that the Japanese would soon invade India. In March 1942 the war cabinet of British Prime Minister [Winston Churchill](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Winston-Churchill) sent the socialist [Sir Richard Stafford Cripps](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stafford-Cripps), a close personal friend of Nehru, to New Delhi with a postwar proposal. The Cripps Mission offered Indian politicians full “dominion status” for India after the war’s end, with the additional stipulation, as a [concession](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/concession) primarily to the Muslim League, that any province could vote to “opt out” of such a dominion if it preferred to do so. Gandhi irately called the offer “a post-dated cheque on a bank that was failing,” and Nehru was equally negative and angry at Cripps for his readiness to give so much to the Muslims. Cripps’s hands had been tied by Churchill before he left London, however, as he was ordered by the war cabinet merely to convey the British offer, not to modify it or negotiate a new formula. He flew home empty-handed in less than a month, and soon afterward Gandhi planned his last satyagraha campaign, the Quit India movement. Declaring that the British presence in India was a provocation to the Japanese, Gandhi called on the British to “quit India” and to leave Indians to deal with the Japanese by nonviolent means, but Gandhi and all members of the Congress Party high command were arrested before the dawn of that movement in August 1942. In a few months at least 60,000 Indians filled British prison cells, and the raj unleashed massive force against Indian underground efforts to disrupt rail transport and to generally subvert the war effort that followed the crackdown on the Quit India campaign. Parts of the United Provinces, Bihar, the North-West Frontier, and Bengal were bombed and strafed by British pilots as the raj resolved to crush all Indian resistance and violent opposition as swiftly as possible. Thousands of Indians were killed and wounded, but wartime resistance continued as more young Indians, women as well as men, were recruited into the Congress’s underground.

Japan’s [attack on Pearl Harbor](https://www.britannica.com/event/Pearl-Harbor-attack), Hawaii, in December 1941 brought the United States into the war as Britain’s most powerful ally. By late 1942 and throughout the rest of the war, U.S. arms and planes steamed and flew into Calcutta (Kolkata) and Bombay (Mumbai), [bolstering](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/bolstering) British India as the major Allied launching pad against Japanese forces in Southeast Asia and China. The British raj thus remained firm despite growing Indian opposition, both violent and nonviolent. Indian industry grew rapidly, moreover, during World War II. Electric power output doubled, and the [Tata](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tata-Group) steel plant at [Jamshedpur](https://www.britannica.com/place/Jamshedpur) became the British Empire’s foremost by the war’s end. Indian shipyards and light-manufacturing plants flourished in Bombay, as well as in Bengal and Orissa, and, despite many warnings, the Japanese never launched major air attacks against Calcutta or Madras (Chennai). In mid-1943 Field Marshall [Lord Wavell](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Archibald-Percival-Wavell-1st-Earl-Wavell), who replaced Linlithgow as viceroy (1943–47), brought India’s government fully under martial control for the war’s duration. No progress was made in several of the Congress Party’s attempts to resolve Hindu-Muslim differences through talks between Gandhi and Jinnah. Soon after the war’s end in Europe, Wavell convened a political conference in Simla (Shimla) in late June 1945, but there was no meeting of minds, no formula sturdy enough to bridge the gulf between the Congress and the Muslim League.

Two weeks after the Simla talks collapsed in midsummer, Churchill’s [Conservative Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Conservative-Party-political-party-United-Kingdom) government was voted out of power by the [Labour Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Labour-Party-political-party)’s sweep of British polls, and the new prime minister, [Clement Attlee](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Clement-Attlee), appointed one of Gandhi’s old admirers, [Lord Pethick-Lawrence](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-William-Pethick-Lawrence-Baron-Pethick-Lawrence-of-Peaslake), to head the India Office. With the dawn of the atomic age in August and Japan’s surrender, London’s primary concern in India was how to find the political solution to the Hindu-Muslim conflict that would most expeditiously permit the British raj to [withdraw](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/withdraw) its forces and to extricate as many of its assets as possible from what seemed to the Labour Party to have become more of an imperial burden and liability than any real advantage for Great Britain.

**The transfer of power and the birth of two countries**

Elections held in the winter of 1945–46 proved how effective Jinnah’s single-plank strategy for his Muslim League had been, as the league won all 30 seats reserved for Muslims in the Central Legislative Assembly and most of the reserved provincial seats as well. The Congress Party was successful in gathering most of the general electorate seats, but it could no longer effectively insist that it spoke for the entire population of British India.

In 1946 Secretary of State Pethick-Lawrence personally led a three-man cabinet deputation to New Delhi with the hope of resolving the Congress–Muslim League deadlock and, thus, of transferring British power to a single Indian administration. Cripps was responsible primarily for drafting the ingenious Cabinet Mission Plan, which proposed a three-tier federation for India, [integrated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integrated) by a minimal central-union government in Delhi, which would be limited to handling foreign affairs, communications, defense, and only those finances required to care for such unionwide matters. The subcontinent was to be divided into three major groups of provinces: Group A, to include the Hindu-majority provinces of the Bombay Presidency, Madras, the United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, and the Central Provinces (virtually all of what became independent India a year later); Group B, to contain the Muslim-majority provinces of the Punjab, Sind, the North-West Frontier, and Balochistan (the areas out of which the western part of Pakistan was created); and Group C, to include the Muslim-majority Bengal (a portion of which became the eastern part of Pakistan and in 1971 the country of Bangladesh) and the Hindu-majority Assam. The group governments were to be virtually [autonomous](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/autonomous) in everything but matters reserved to the union centre, and within each group the princely states were to be integrated into their neighbouring provinces. Local provincial governments were to have the choice of opting out of the group in which they found themselves should a majority of their populace vote to do so.

Punjab’s large and powerful Sikh population would have been placed in a particularly difficult and anomalous position, for Punjab as a whole would have belonged to Group B, and much of the Sikh community had become anti-Muslim since the start of the Mughal emperors’ persecution of their [Gurus](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Guru-Sikhism) in the 17th century. Sikhs played so important a role in the British Indian Army that many of their leaders hoped that the British would reward them at the war’s end with special assistance in carving out their own country from the rich heart of Punjab’s fertile canal-colony lands, where, in the kingdom once ruled by [Ranjit Singh](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ranjit-Singh-Sikh-maharaja) (1780–1839), most Sikhs lived. Since World War I, Sikhs had been equally fierce in opposing the British raj, and, though never more than 2 percent of India’s population, they had as highly disproportionate a number of nationalist “martyrs” as of army officers. A Sikh [Akali Dal](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shiromani-Akali-Dal) (“Party of Immortals”), which was started in 1920, led militant marches to liberate [*gurdwara*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/gurdwara)s (“doorways to the Guru”; the Sikh places of worship) from corrupt Hindu managers. [Tara Singh](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tara-Singh) (1885–1967), the most important leader of the vigorous Sikh political movement, first raised the demand for a separate Azad (“Free”) Punjab in 1942. By March 1946 many Sikhs demanded a Sikh nation-state, alternately called Sikhistan or [Khalistan](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Khalistan) (“Land of the Sikhs” or “Land of the Pure”). The Cabinet Mission, however, had no time or energy to focus on Sikh separatist demands and found the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan equally impossible to accept.

As a pragmatist, Jinnah—terminally afflicted with tuberculosis and lung cancer—accepted the Cabinet Mission’s proposal, as did Congress Party leaders. The early summer of 1946, therefore, saw a dawn of hope for India’s future prospects, but that soon proved false when Nehru announced at his first press [conference](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/conference) as the reelected president of the Congress that no constituent assembly could be “bound” by any prearranged constitutional formula. Jinnah read Nehru’s remarks as a “complete repudiation” of the plan, which had to be accepted in its entirety in order to work. Jinnah then convened the league’s Working Committee, which withdrew its previous agreement to the federation scheme and instead called upon the “Muslim Nation” to launch “direct action” in mid-August 1946. Thus began India’s bloodiest year of civil war since the mutiny nearly a century earlier. The Hindu-Muslim rioting and killing that started in Calcutta sent deadly sparks of fury, frenzy, and fear to every corner of the subcontinent, as all restraint seemed to disappear.

[Lord Mountbatten](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-Mountbatten-1st-Earl-Mountbatten) (served March–August 1947) was sent to replace Wavell as viceroy as Britain prepared to transfer its power over India to some “responsible” hands by no later than June 1948. Shortly after reaching Delhi, where he [conferred](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/conferred) with the leaders of all parties and with his own officials, Mountbatten decided that the situation was too dangerous to wait even that brief period. Fearing a forced evacuation of British troops still stationed in India, Mountbatten resolved to opt for partition, one that would divide Punjab and Bengal, rather than risk further political negotiations while civil war raged and a new mutiny of Indian troops seemed imminent. Among the major Indian leaders, Gandhi alone refused to reconcile himself to partition and urged Mountbatten to offer Jinnah the premiership of a united India rather than a separate Muslim nation. Nehru, however, would not agree to that, nor would his most powerful Congress deputy, [Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vallabhbhai-Patel) (1875–1950), as both had become tired of arguing with Jinnah and were [eager](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/eager) to get on with the job of running an independent government of India.

Britain’s Parliament passed in July 1947 the [Indian Independence Act](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-Independence-Act-1947). It ordered that the dominions of India and Pakistan be demarcated by midnight of August 14–15, 1947, and that the assets of the world’s largest empire—which had been integrated in countless ways for more than a century—be divided within a single month. Racing the deadline, two boundary commissions worked desperately to partition Punjab and Bengal in such a way as to leave the maximum practical number of Muslims to the west of the former’s new boundary and to the east of the latter’s, but, as soon as the new borders were known, roughly 15 million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs fled from their homes on one side of the newly demarcated borders to what they thought would be “shelter” on the other. In the course of that tragic [exodus](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/exodus) of innocents, as many as a million people were slaughtered in communal massacres. Sikhs, settled astride Punjab’s new “line,” suffered the highest proportion of casualties relative to their numbers. Most Sikh refugees relocated in the relatively small area of what is now the Indian border state of Punjab. Tara Singh later asked, “The Muslims got their Pakistan, and the Hindus got their Hindustan, but what did the Sikhs get?”

The transfer of power was completed on August 14 in Pakistan and August 15 in India, held a day apart so that Lord Mountbatten could attend both ceremonies. With the birth of the two independent nations, the British raj formally came to an end on August 15, 1947.

(Source : [*Stanley A. Wolpert*](https://www.britannica.com/contributor/Stanley-A-Wolpert/3247)

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