

Bengal famine of 1943, famine that affected Bengal in British India in 1943. It resulted in the deaths of some three million people due to malnutrition or disease.

While many famines are the result of inadequate food supply, the Bengal famine did not coincide with any significant shortfall in food production. According to the Indian economist Amartya Sen, who himself witnessed the famine as a nine-year-old boy, the famine was the result of an entitlement failure. In other words, the distribution of the food supply throughout Bengali society was hindered primarily by economic factors that affected the ability of certain groups of people to purchase food.

Events in 1942 had a relatively minor impact on the supply of food. After Burma (Myanmar) and Singapore fell to Japan in 1942 in the midst of World War II, rice exports from those countries were halted. A cyclone in October 1942 also damaged the autumn rice crop and put pressure on the following year's crop because, to survive, many subsistence farmers had to consume grain meant for planting. Still, the 1942 halt in rice imports to India did not cause the famine, and the 1943 crop yield was actually sufficient to feed the people of Bengal.

It was ultimately special wartime factors that caused this difficult situation to become a disastrous famine. Fearing Japanese invasion, British authorities stockpiled food to feed defending troops, and they exported considerable quantities to British forces in the Middle East. They also confiscated boats, carts, and elephants in Chittagong, where the invasion was expected. This deprived fishermen and their customers of the ability to operate and generally inhibited the sort of low-level commerce upon which many Bengalis relied for survival.

In the wake of these actions by the British, anxiety about shortages caused hoarding, speculation, and consequent price inflation that put even a basic subsistence diet beyond the means of many of Bengal's workers. The government's failure to halt rice exports or seek relief supplies from elsewhere resulted in a disaster that killed millions of people.

During 1943 the Bengal government, aided by the British army, managed to distribute more than 110 million free meals, but it is an indication of the intensity and scale of the famine that this effort barely scratched the surface of the starving populace's need.

Fid Backhouse and others
The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica
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Queen Elizabeth II addresses at opening of Parliament. (Date unknown on photo, but may be 1958, the first time the opening of Parliament was filmed.)

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Aurochs. *Bos primigenius*. Skeleton. Extinct animal. Skeleton of an Aurochs, an extinct wild ox.

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7 of History's Most Notorious Serial Killers

World History

Global Exploration

Queen Victoria, Empress of India

Queen Victoria, Empress of India Portrait of Queen Victoria, from an 1882 photograph by Alexander Bassano. She had been named Empress of India in 1876.

British raj

Indian and Pakistani history

Written by

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Quick Facts

Date: 1857 - 1947

Location: India Pakistan

Participants: British Empire India Pakistan

Context: East India Company Government of India Acts Indian Rebellion of 1857

Key People: Bahadur Shah II Charles John Canning, Earl Canning James Andrew Broun

Ramsay, marquess and 10th earl of Dalhousie Mahatma Gandhi John Laird Mair Lawrence, 1st Baron Lawrence

Top Questions

What was the British Raj?

When did the British Raj begin and end?

Why did the British establish control over India and Pakistan?

What was the role of the East India Company in the British Raj?

British raj, period of direct British rule over the Indian subcontinent from 1858 until the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. The raj succeeded management of the subcontinent by the British East India Company, after general distrust and dissatisfaction with company leadership resulted in a widespread mutiny of sepoy troops in 1857, causing the British to reconsider the structure of governance in India. The British government took possession of the company's assets and imposed direct rule. The raj was intended to increase Indian participation in governance, but the powerlessness of Indians to determine their own future without the consent of the British led to an increasingly adamant national independence movement.

Background

Though trade with India had been highly valued by Europeans since ancient times, the long route between them was subject to many potential obstacles and obfuscations from middlemen, making trade unsafe, unreliable, and expensive. This was especially true after the collapse of the Mongol empire and the rise of the Ottoman Empire all but blocked the ancient Silk Road. As Europeans, led by the Portuguese, began to explore maritime navigation routes to bypass middlemen, the distance of the venture required merchants to set up fortified posts.

The British entrusted this task to the East India Company, which initially established itself in India by obtaining permission from local authorities to own land, fortify its holdings, and conduct trade duty-free in mutually beneficial relationships. The company's territorial paramountcy began after it became involved in hostilities, sidelining rival European companies and eventually overthrowing the nawab of Bengal and installing a puppet in 1757. The company's control over Bengal was effectively consolidated in the 1770s when Warren Hastings brought the nawab's administrative offices to Calcutta (now Kolkata) under his oversight. About the same time, the British Parliament began regulating the East India Company through successive India Acts, bringing Bengal under the indirect control of the British government. Over the next eight decades, a series of wars, treaties, and annexations extended the dominion of the company across the subcontinent, subjugating most of India to the determination of British governors and merchants.

Flag of India

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India: Climax of the raj, 1858–85

The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857

In late March 1857 a sepoy (Indian soldier) in the employ of the East India Company named Mangal Pandey attacked British officers at the military garrison in Barrackpore. He was arrested and then executed by the British in early April. Later in April sepoy troopers at Meerut, having heard a rumour that they would have to bite cartridges that had been greased with the lard of pigs and cows (forbidden for consumption by Muslims and Hindus, respectively) to ready them for use in their new Enfield rifles, refused the cartridges. As punishment, they were given long prison terms, fettered, and put in jail. This punishment incensed their comrades, who rose on May 10, shot their British officers, and marched to Delhi, where there were no European troops. There the local sepoy garrison joined the Meerut men, and by nightfall the aged pensionary Mughal emperor Bahādur Shah II had been nominally restored to power by a tumultuous soldiery. The seizure of Delhi provided a focus and set the pattern for the whole mutiny, which then spread throughout northern India. With the exception of the Mughal emperor and his sons and Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the deposed Maratha peshwa, none of the important Indian princes joined the mutineers. The mutiny officially came to an end on July 8, 1859.

Aftermath of the mutiny

The immediate result of the mutiny was a general housecleaning of the Indian administration. The East India Company was abolished in favour of the direct rule of India by the British government. In concrete terms, this did not mean much, but it introduced a more personal note into the government and removed the unimaginative commercialism that had lingered in the Court of Directors. The financial crisis caused by the mutiny led to a reorganization of the Indian administration's finances on a modern basis. The Indian army was also extensively reorganized.

Another significant result of the mutiny was the beginning of the policy of consultation with Indians. The Legislative Council of 1853 had contained only Europeans and had arrogantly behaved as if it were a full-fledged parliament. It was widely felt that a lack of communication with Indian opinion had helped to precipitate the crisis. Accordingly, the new council of 1861 was given an Indian-nominated element. The educational and public works programs (roads, railways, telegraphs, and irrigation) continued with little interruption; in fact, some were stimulated by the thought of their value for the transport of troops in a crisis. But insensitive British-imposed social measures that affected Hindu society came to an abrupt end.

Finally, there was the effect of the mutiny on the people of India themselves. Traditional society had made its protest against the incoming alien influences, and it had failed. The princes and other natural leaders had either held aloof from the mutiny or had proved, for the most part, incompetent. From this time all serious hope of a revival of the past or an exclusion of the West diminished. The traditional structure of Indian society began to break down and was eventually superseded by a Westernized class system, from which emerged a strong middle class with a heightened sense of Indian nationalism.

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(For more on the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, see also Indian Mutiny and the discussion of the mutiny in India.)

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British rule

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 (governed 1856–62) announced Queen Victoria'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'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 to the British crown. In 1876, at the prompting of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, Queen Victoria added the title Empress of India to her regality. British fears of another mutiny and consequent determination to bolster Indian states as “natural breakwaters” against any future tidal wave 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 and Muslim reaction against the secularizing inroads of utilitarian positivism and the proselytizing of Christian missionaries. 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 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 put it, to “take up the white man's burden.” By and large, throughout the

interlude of their Indian service to the 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, Bombay [Mumbai], and Madras [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 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 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, 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 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 were, for the most part, replaced by suspicion, indifference, and fear.

Queen Victoria’s 1858 promise of racial equality of 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 posted “on the spot.”

Government organization

Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 1st earl of Lytton

Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 1st earl of Lytton

From 1858 to 1909 the government of India was an increasingly centralized paternal despotism and the world’s largest imperial bureaucracy. The Indian Councils Act 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 remained the viceroy’s 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 (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 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

British merchant ship, Bombay (Mumbai), India

British merchant ship, Bombay (Mumbai), India
British merchant ship approaching Bombay (Mumbai) Harbour; oil on canvas by J.C. Heard, c. 1850.

Economically, it was an era of increased commercial agricultural production, rapidly expanding trade, early industrial development, and severe famine. The 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 to China; the third was the tax on salt, also jealously guarded by the crown as its official monopoly preserve. An individual 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 to the doctrine of laissez-faire during that period, a 10 percent customs duty 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 (1839–1904) was in full operation at Nagpur, 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.

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 (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 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 (1861–65), but, after the Civil War ended, restoring raw cotton from the southern 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 (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 also accelerated the destruction of India's 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 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 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), 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. The jute textile industry, Bengal's counterpart to Bombay's cotton industry, developed in the wake of the 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 in the 1850s and in southern India's Nilgiri Hills some 20 years later. By 1871 there were more than 300 tea plantations, covering in excess of 30,000 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 dyes made that natural product obsolete. Coffee plantations flourished in southern India from 1860 to 1879, after which disease blighted the crop and sent Indian coffee into a decade of decline.

Foreign policy

The northwest frontier

John Laird Mair Lawrence, 1st Baron Lawrence

John Laird Mair Lawrence, 1st Baron Lawrence

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) 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 in the 1860s provided even greater anxiety and 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 mountain range and, indeed, up to Afghanistan's northern border along the 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 (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 died, Lawrence wisely refrained from attempting to name his successor, leaving Dōst Moḥammad’s 16 sons to fight their own fratricidal battles until 1868, when Shīr ‘Alī Khan finally emerged victorious. Lawrence then recognized and subsidized the new emir. The viceroy, Lord Mayo (governed 1869–72), met to confer with Shīr ‘Alī 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 in 1872.

The Second Anglo-Afghan War

Russia’s glacial advance into Turkistan sufficiently alarmed Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and his secretary of state for India, Robert Salisbury, that by 1874, when they came to power in London, they pressed the government of India to pursue a more vigorous interventionist line with the Afghan government. The viceroy, Lord 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 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 desired, and, soon after he reached Calcutta, he notified Shīr ‘Alī that he was sending a “mission” to 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, Sir 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 ‘Alī 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, Ya‘qūb Khan. Ya‘qūb Khan promised, in exchange for British support and protection, to admit to his Kabul court a British resident who would direct Afghan foreign relations, but the resident, Sir Louis Cavagnari, was assassinated on September 3, 1879, just two months after he arrived. British troops trudged back over the passes to Kabul and removed Ya‘qūb from the throne, which remained vacant until July 1880, when ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khan, nephew of Shīr ‘Alī, became emir. The new emir, one of the shrewdest statesmen in Afghan history, remained secure on the throne until his death in 1901.

Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th marquess of Lansdowne

Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th marquess of LansdowneHenry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, 5th marquess of Lansdowne, detail of portrait by P.A. de Laszlo, 1920; in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

George Nathaniel Curzon, Marquess Curzon

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George Nathaniel Curzon, Marquess Curzon

The viceroy, Lord 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, was completed in 1896 and added the tribal territory of the Afrīdīs, Maḥsūds, Wazīrīs, and Swātīs, as well as the chieftainships of Chitral and Gilgit, to the domain of British India. The 9th earl of Elgin (governed 1894–99), Lansdowne's successor, devoted much of his viceregal tenure to sending British Indian armies on punitive expeditions along the new frontier. The viceroy, 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) 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) was completed during that period. The Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852) had left the kingdom of Ava (Upper Burma; see Alaungpaya dynasty) independent of British India, and, under the rule of King Mindon (1853–78), who built his capital at Mandalay, steamers bringing British residents and private traders up the Irrawaddy River from Rangoon (Yangon) were welcomed. Mindon, noted for 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. 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 to finance the construction of a railway and the general commercial development of the kingdom, but his plans were thwarted. The viceroy, Lord Dufferin (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 by proclamation to British India.

Indian nationalism and the British response, 1885–1920

Origins of the nationalist movement

The 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 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 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, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas 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 (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 in Calcutta. In 1883 he 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 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 (1842–1901), who had graduated at the top of the first bachelor of arts class at the University of Bombay (now 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 (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 Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915), later revered by Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi (1869–1948) as a political guru (preceptor). Gokhale, an editor

and social reformer, taught at Fergusson College in Poona (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 of British liberalism, he was able to achieve much for India.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

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 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 and 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 (Ganapati) and Shivaji festivals in the 1890s. Tilak had no faith in British 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 communal tensions and conflict.

The viceroynalties of Lytton and Lord 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 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 (1829–1912), Ripon's radical confidant. After retiring from the ICS in 1882, Hume, a 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 a movement most flattering to Indian civilization.

Helena Blavatsky

1 of 2

Helena Blavatsky Helena Blavatsky, detail of an oil painting by Hermann Schmiechen, 1884; in a private collection.

Jiddu Krishnamurti and Annie Besant

2 of 2

Jiddu Krishnamurti and Annie Besant Jiddu Krishnamurti and Annie Besant, 1933.

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 (1824–83), whose "back to the Vedas" reformist Hindu society, the Arya Samaj, was founded in Bombay in 1875. Dayananda called on Hindus to reject the "corrupting" excrescences of their faith, including idolatry, the

caste system, 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 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 (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 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 and Jain. Practically all the Hindu delegates were Brahmans. 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 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 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, 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 millions or considered them the rantings of disloyal extremists. Despite the combination of official 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 and by failing to appreciate the importance of human sympathy in his relentless drive toward greater efficiency.

The first 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-speaking “nation,” leaving western Bengal’s *bhadralok* (“respectable people”), the intellectual Hindu leadership of Calcutta, tied to the much less politically active Bihari- and Oriya-speaking Hindus to their north and south. A new Muslim-majority province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was created with its capital at Dacca (now 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 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.

Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore

The new tide of national sentiment born in Bengal rose to inundate India in every direction, and “Bande Mataram” (“Hail to Thee Mother”) became the Congress’s national anthem, its words taken from *Anandamath*, a popular Bengali novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and its music composed by Bengal’s greatest poet, 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 saris 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 in the 1880s. The movement for national education spread throughout Bengal, as well as to Varanasi (Banaras), where Pandit 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 of Indian nationalism. Swaraj was first articulated, in the presidential address of 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 nationalist political demands, Islam had, since the founding of the Delhi sultanate in 1206, provided Indian Muslims with sufficient doctrinal mortar to unite them as a separate religious community. The era of effective Mughal rule (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 (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 in 1874 and returned to found the Anglo-Muhammadan Oriental College (now Aligarh Muslim University) at Aligarh in 1875. It was India's first centre of Islamic and Western higher education, with instruction given in English and modeled on Oxford. Aligarh became the intellectual cradle of the Muslim League and Pakistan.

Aga Khan III

Aga Khan III The progressive and politically active imam Aga Khan III, at a Paris horse racetrack in 1935.

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, that in 1906 called on Lord 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, the Aga Khan's 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

John Morley

John Morley John Morley, c. 1890–94.

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, was able to introduce several important innovations into the legislative and administrative machinery of the British Indian government. First, he acted to 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 (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 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 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 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 new parliamentary procedures by introducing a measure for free and compulsory 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, but the assembly, plagued by conflict, never came to order long enough to hear the presidential address of its 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 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 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.

Charles Hardinge, 1st Baron Hardinge

Charles Hardinge, 1st Baron Hardinge Charles Hardinge, 1st Baron Hardinge, oil painting by Sir William Orpen, 1919; in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Before the end of 1910, Minto finally returned home, and Morley appointed the liberal Lord 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 journeyed to India for his coronation *darbar* (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 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 assassin escaped in the crowd. Later that year 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

New Delhi: All India War Memorial arch

New Delhi: All India War Memorial arch All India War Memorial arch (popularly called the India Gate), New Delhi, India; designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens.

In August 1914 Lord Hardinge announced his government's entry into 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 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 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 achieved victory. The government of India's immediate military support was of vital importance in bolstering the Western Front, 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. The Indian Corps sustained extraordinarily heavy losses during the winter campaigns of 1914–15 on the Western Front. The 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 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 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, the government of India launched an army to the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab to further Viceroy Curzon's policy of control over the Persian Gulf region. Al-Basrah (Basra) was taken easily in December 1914, and by October 1915 the British Indian Army had moved as far north as Al-Kūt (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 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.

1st Viscount Chelmsford

1st Viscount Chelmsford

Edwin Montagu, Chamberlain's successor at Whitehall's India Office, informed the British House of Commons 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 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 (governed 1916–21), and their lengthy deliberations bore fruit in the 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 Sikhs who had sought to emigrate from their Punjab homes to Canada but who were 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 ("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, 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 for aid and urged the emir to start a holy war against the British and in defense of the caliphate. After the war the Khilafat movement, an offspring of growing pan-Islamic 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 at the war’s inception.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah

Mohammad Ali Jinnah

The deaths of Gokhale and of the Bombay political leader Sir 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 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 of political power by the Congress, Muslim leaders, including Mohammad 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, 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, 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, a pandemic that took a far heavier 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 allies but reverted immediately to the status of "natives." Most of the soldiers recruited during the war had come from the Punjab, 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 early in 1919. Those "black acts," as they came to be called, were peacetime 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, the Gujarati barrister who had returned from living for many years in 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 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 and from 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, 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 was sent from Jalandhar (Jullundur) with Gurkha (Nepalese) and Balochi troops to restore order.

Jallianwala Bagh Massacre at Amritsar

Massacre of Amritsar site

Massacre of Amritsar site Portion of a wall in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, Punjab, India, with bullet marks from the Massacre of Amritsar on April 13, 1919.

Soon after 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 and, on April 15, placed the entire province under 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, and in Parliament members of the 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’s philosophy and strategy

For Gandhi, there was no 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 (holy man) and revered him as a mahatma (which in Sanskrit means “great soul”). He chose satya (“truth”) and 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). 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 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 call than they had to Tilak's revivalism, but Gandhi laboured valiantly to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity by embracing the Ali brothers' Khilafat movement as the "premier plank" of his national program. Launched in response to the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the Khilafat movement coincided with the inception of satyagraha, thus giving the 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, 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 (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 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 with communal civil war, mass migration, and partition.

Constitutional reforms

British politicians and bureaucrats tried to cure India's ailing 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) 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 Indian religious 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) 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 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 Legislative Council was transformed into a bicameral legislature consisting of a Legislative Assembly (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 (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, 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 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.

Mohandas K. Gandhi

Mohandas K. Gandhi
Mohandas K. Gandhi with delegates of the Indian Round Table Conference, London.

The act of 1935 was itself the product of the three elaborate sessions of the Round Table Conference, held in London, and at least five years of 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 in the City of Westminster, London, in November 1930. While Jinnah and the 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 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 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 was established as a province distinct from Bihar, and in the west Sind (Sindh) was separated from the Bombay Presidency and became the first Muslim-majority governor's province of British India since the reunification of Bengal. It was decided that Burma should be a separate colony from British India.

In August 1932 Prime Minister MacDonald announced his Communal Award, Great Britain's 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), Anglo-Indians, Europeans, distinct regional groups (such as the Marathas in the Bombay Presidency), and special interests (women, organized labour, 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." Gandhi undertook a "fast unto death" against that offer, which he viewed as a 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 (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 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 weapon—calling upon the peasants of Bardoli in Gujarat to boycott land taxes. In February 1922, on the eve of that final phase of boycott, word reached Gandhi that in Chauri Chaura, United Provinces (now in 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 which he was sentenced to six years in prison.

Motilal Nehru

Motilal Nehru

While Gandhi was behind bars, Motilal Nehru (1861–1931), one of northern India's wealthiest lawyers, started within Congress a new politically active "party," the Swaraj Party. Motilal Nehru shared the lead of the new party with C.R. (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 ashrams (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 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 solutions to India’s problems, which so often 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 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 was never really attacked or dismantled by the Congress.

Gandhi, Mohandas: Salt March

Gandhi, Mohandas: Salt March
Statue depicting Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi during the 1930 Salt March.

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 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 (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.

Subhas Chandra Bose

Subhas Chandra Bose

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 (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 and fled to Afghanistan, thence to the Soviet Union and Germany, where he remained until 1943.

Jawaharlal Nehru

Jawaharlal NehruJawaharlal Nehru, photograph by Yousef Karsh, 1956.

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 and a barrister, the younger Nehru was educated at Harrow School, London, and at Trinity College, 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 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, a practical concession young Jawaharlal had often vowed he would never make.

Muslim separatism

Liaquat Ali Khan

Liaquat Ali Khan

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 announced his modernist Turkish reforms in 1923 and disavowed the very title of caliph the following year. Hindu-Muslim riots along the southwestern 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, 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 (1875–1949) organized their own party (eventually to become the National Liberal Federation), while others, like Jinnah, dropped out of political life entirely. Jinnah, alienated by Gandhi and his illiterate mass of devoutly Hindu 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 (later 1st Earl Halifax; governed 1926–31) and Prime Minister MacDonald to convene the Round Table Conference in

London, was urged by many Muslim compatriots—including 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. (The princely state of Hyderabad in the south was ruled by a Muslim dynasty but was mostly Hindu.) One of Punjab's greatest Urdu poets, Sir Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877–1938), while presiding over the Muslim League's annual meeting in Allahabad 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 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, 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 (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 constitutionalist by 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 "third" party. The years from 1937 to 1939, when the Congress Party actually ran most of British India's provincial governments, became the seed period for the Muslim League's growth in popularity and power within the entire Muslim community, for many Muslims soon viewed the new "Hindu raj" as 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 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 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 (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 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 'independent States' in which the 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 the establishment of not two separately administered Muslim countries but rather a single Muslim nation-state—namely, Pakistan.

Gandhi launched his first “individual satyagraha” campaign against the war in October 1940. 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, 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 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, 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 and then Bengal from British rule, but the British forces at India’s eastern gateways held until the summer monsoon gave them respite enough to be properly reinforced and drove Bose and his army back down the Malay Peninsula. In August 1945 Bose escaped by air from Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam), but he died of severe burns after his overloaded plane crashed onto the island of Formosa (Taiwan).

British wartime strategy

Beohar Rammanohar Sinha: Quit India Movement

Beohar Rammanohar Sinha: Quit India MovementThe Quit India Movement depicted in a mural painted by Beohar Rammanohar Sinha, c. 1952, Jabalpur, India.

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 sent the socialist Sir Richard 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 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.

Archibald Percival Wavell, 1st Earl Wavell

Archibald Percival Wavell, 1st Earl Wavell

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, 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 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 steel plant at 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, 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 government was voted out of power by the Labour Party's sweep of British polls, and the new prime minister, Clement Attlee, appointed one of Gandhi's old admirers, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 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 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 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 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 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 (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 ("Party of Immortals"), which was started in 1920, led militant marches to liberate gurdwaras ("doorways to the Guru"; the Sikh places of worship) from corrupt Hindu managers. 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 ("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 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.

Louis Mountbatten

Louis Mountbatten Louis Mountbatten, 1st Earl Mountbatten.

Lord 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 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 (1875–1950), as both had become tired of arguing with Jinnah and were 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. 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 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.

"Many people sold their boys and girls for a little rice. Many wives and young women ran off, hand-in-hand with men they knew or didn't know."

Bijoykrishna Tripathi is describing the desperate measures people took to find food during the Bengal famine.

He is not sure of his exact age, but his voter card says he is 112. Bijoykrishna is one of the last people to remember the disaster.

He talks faintly and slowly about growing up in Midnapore, a district in Bengal. Rice was the staple food, and he remembers its price rising "by leaps and bounds" in the summer of 1942.

Getty Images Child begging during Bengal famineGetty Images

Millions died during the Bengal famine of 1943

Then came the cyclone of October that year, which blew the roof of his house off and destroyed that year's rice crop. Rice soon became unaffordable for his family.

"Hunger stalked us. Hunger and epidemics. People of all ages began to die."

Bijoykrishna remembers some food relief, but says it was inadequate.

"Everyone had to live with half-empty stomachs," he says. "Since there was nothing to eat, many people in the village died. People started looting, searching for food."

Listening to him on his veranda are four generations of his family. Also with them is Sainen Sarkar who, for the past few years, has been travelling around the Bengali countryside, gathering first-hand accounts from survivors of the devastating famine.

The 72-year-old is warm, has a youthful air, and smiles easily. You can see why people like Bijoykrishna open up to him. He travels around the countryside in his open-toed sandals, whatever the weather, with his backpack and a supply of roll-up cigarettes. He is old-school, taking down the testimonies with pen and paper.

Sainen says he first became "obsessed" by the Bengal famine because of a family photograph album. He would flick through it as a little boy in Calcutta (now Kolkata), staring at the photographs of emaciated people.

The pictures had been taken by his father, who had been involved with a local Indian charity, giving out relief during the famine. Sainen says his father was a poor man. "In my childhood I saw the terror of starvation in his eyes," he says.

However, it was not until 2013 when Sainen - now a retired teacher - started his quest. While walking in Midnapore, he fell into conversation about the famine with an 86-year-old man.

The famine forced Sripaticharan Samanta to leave his home village and take his chances in the city

Sripaticharan Samanta, like Bijoykrishna, also remembered the devastating cyclone. Life was already getting harder by that point, and the price of rice had been increasing steadily.

By October 1942 he was eating one small meal of rice a day. Then the storm hit.

Sripaticharan remembered how the price of rice skyrocketed after the cyclone, and how traders bought up whatever was left at any price.

"Soon there was no rice in our village," he told Sailen. "People lived off saved stocks for a while but started to sell off their lands just to have rice to eat."

After the storm, his family's household rice reserves lasted for only a few days, then ran out.

Like tens of thousands of others, Sripaticharan left the countryside for the city - in his case, Calcutta - in the hope of relief. He was lucky - he had a family member to stay with - and he survived. But many were not so fortunate, collapsing on roadsides, around dustbins, and dying on the pavements - strangers in a city they thought would help them.

The devastating story of the Bengal Famine of 1943 in British India, where at least three million people died, told for the first time by the eyewitnesses to it.

The causes of the famine are many and complex, and continue to be widely debated.

In 1942, rice supplies in Bengal were under intense pressure.

Burma - which bordered Bengal - was invaded by Japan early in the year, and rice imports from that country stopped abruptly.

Bengal now found itself near the front line and Calcutta became host to hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers and workers in wartime industries, increasing the demand for rice. Wartime inflation was rife, putting the price of rice out of reach for millions who were already struggling.

Meanwhile, British fears that the Japanese would attempt to invade east India prompted a "denial" policy - this involved confiscating surplus rice and boats from towns and villages in the Bengal Delta. The aim was to deny food supplies and transport to any advancing force, but it disrupted the already fragile local economy, and caused prices to rise further. Rice was hoarded for food security, but often for profit.

To cap it all, the devastating cyclone of October 1942 destroyed many rice crops, with crop disease ruining much of the rest.

There is a long-running and often heated debate over culpability for this humanitarian catastrophe and in particular whether British Prime Minister Winston Churchill did enough - in the middle of a war on many fronts - to alleviate the crisis and help Indians, once he knew about its severity.

Relief efforts started to be put into place by the end of 1943 with the arrival of a new viceroy, Field Marshall Lord Wavell. But many had already died by then.

Getty Images Long queue for a soup kitchen winds round a street in Kolkata
Queuing for soup in Calcutta (Kolkata) in late 1943

'A living archive'

Discussions over the causes and who was to blame have often overshadowed the stories of the survivors.

Sailen has now gathered more than 60 eyewitness accounts. In most cases, the people he says he talked to were uneducated, and had rarely spoken about the famine or been asked, even by their own family.

There is no archive dedicated to collecting survivor testimonies. Sailen believes their stories were overlooked because they were the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

"It is as if they were all waiting. If only someone would listen to their words," he says.

Niratan Bedwa was 100 when Sailen met her. She described the agony of mothers trying to look after their children.

"Mothers didn't have any breast milk. Their bodies had become all bones, no flesh," she said. "Many children died at birth, their mothers too. Even those that were born healthy died young from hunger. Lots of women killed themselves at that time."

She also told Sailen that some wives ran off with other men if their husbands could not feed them. "At that time people weren't so scandalised by these things," she said. "When you have no rice in your belly, and no-one who can feed you, who is going to judge you anyway?"

Sailen also talked to people who had profited from the famine. One man admitted that he bought up a lot of land "in exchange for rice and dal or a little money". He also told Sailen that another household died without an heir, so he took the land as his own.

Kushanava Choudhury, a Bengali-American writer, accompanied Sailen on one of his visits to meet some of the survivors.

Sailen Sarkar with Kushanava Choudhury

"We didn't have to search for them - they weren't hiding, they were all in plain sight, in villages all across West Bengal and Bangladesh, who were just sitting there as the largest archive in the world," he says.

"Nobody had bothered to talk to them. I felt tremendous shame about that."

The famine is remembered in iconic Indian films, and photographs and sketches from the time, but Kushanava says it has rarely been recalled in the voice of the victims or survivors: "The story is written by the people who it didn't affect. It's a curious phenomena via who tells stories and who constructs reality."

Prof Shruti Kapila of Cambridge University says the fate of the famine victims has perhaps been overshadowed because the 1940s were, for India, a "decade of death".

In 1946, Calcutta was the scene of massive communal riots in which thousands died.

A year later, the British left, dividing the country into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. There was joy at independence, but the partition was bloody and traumatic - more than a million people died as people turned on those of the other religion. Up to 12 million people crossed the new border.

Bengal itself was divided between India and East Pakistan, which would later become Bangladesh.

Prof Kapila says of this period, "There's very little punctuation to a series of mass death events that take place. And that's why I would think that the Bengal famine in a way struggles to find its own place in that narrative."

But while the victims - in their own words - have not been widely heard, she says famine and hunger is seen by many Indians as one of the enduring legacies of Empire.

Eighty years on, there are only a handful of survivors. Sailen remembers going to talk to one man, Anangamohan Das, who was then 91. On hearing why he was there, the man was quiet for some time. Tears then streamed down his sunken cheeks as he said, "Why did you come so late?"

But the dozens of accounts Sailen has collected are a small testament to an event that left millions dead, and millions more lives changed.

Mortality peaked in December 1943, before easing off with the rice harvest at the end of the year, but diseases such as malaria, cholera, and smallpox continued to cause high death rates throughout 1944. State-sponsored relief was hampered by competition between government departments, the imperative to keep Calcutta's war production running, and a familiar reluctance to regulate food prices.

The Bengal famine was, to a greater extent than its predecessors, a man-made disaster (Amrith, 2008; Devereux, 2000). Rice prices increased sharply under the inflationary pressure of the war economy and were accelerated by speculators and merchants who inflated market prices to maximize their profits, rendering food inaccessible to the impoverished rural population

of Bengal (Amrith, 2008). Meanwhile, the priority placed on maintaining the war industries and workers of Calcutta meant that Bengal's food supplies were concentrated there, and it was only at the end of 1943—too late to prevent the worst effects of the famine—that food stores in the city were distributed to rural areas (Greenough, 1980; De, 2014; Sherman, 2013).

The state's failure to prevent famine or mitigate its effects also made a powerful argument against colonial rule and in favor of Indian independence. Just prior to the famine, in July 1942, the Indian National Congress had passed a resolution demanding full independence from the British, and in his Quit India speech the following month, Gandhi called for a nationwide campaign of mass civil disobedience, prompting the arrest of virtually all the Congress leadership, most of whom would see out the war in jail. Further afield, Japanese troops had ejected the British from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, and Burma, and seemed on the point of invading India itself. Under pressure at home and routed abroad, British rule in India—always more reliant on perception than on actual material resources—was facing a serious crisis of authority.

5.1 The famine: causes

By any measure, the Bengal famine was a massive humanitarian disaster. Estimates at the time put the number of dead at between one and a half and two million, either from starvation or more commonly from famine-related diseases like malaria, cholera, and smallpox. The actual figure may well have been much higher, perhaps as many as three million (Devereux, 2000). Another half a million were made destitute and hundreds of thousands more lost land, livestock, and other capital assets as systems of rural patronage crucial to the survival of the poorest sections of Bengali society collapsed (Greenough, 1980). The first signs of impending disaster emerged in late 1942; by the middle of 1943 there was clear evidence of famine in eastern Bengal, and by the following month more or less the whole province was affected. The effects of famine were not distributed evenly through Bengali society but fell disproportionately on the rural poor; the well-to-do in the countryside were largely unaffected, Calcutta was largely spared, and food traders and merchants prospered as prices rose.

People responded to the crisis in much the same debilitating ways they still do now: migrating to cities and towns, selling their possessions and assets to buy food, changing the distribution of food within the family (favoring men above women and adults over children), and splitting their families in search of food and income. Women turned to prostitution and survival sex, and parents sold their children for cash to buy food (Greenough, 1980). There was a clear age and gender bias in patterns of relief and survival, and there is good evidence of widespread abandonment and victimization of vulnerable groups (Bose, 1990).

A congruence of factors lay behind the famine. The threat of a Japanese invasion from neighboring Burma necessitated the movement of colonial troops to Bengal, increasing food consumption at a time when supplies were already under pressure from the influx of hundreds of thousands of Burmese refugees fleeing the Japanese advance (Greenough, 1980). Land was confiscated in order to accommodate troops, depriving parts of the population of their main source of subsistence and income (Greenough, 1980). Livelihoods were further undermined by

a denial policy under which the colonial government confiscated 66,500 boats to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. Many belonged to Bengali fishermen and the owners of offshore rice fields. Meanwhile, wage inflation in the countryside had not kept pace with rising food costs fueled by wartime inflation, hoarding, and price speculation (Sen, 1981), and disease and a cyclone and consequent tidal waves in West Bengal in October 1942 badly damaged the rice crop (Tauger, 2003).

5.2 State relief

Although by October 1942 the crisis indicators set out under the Famine Code had already been met, famine was not officially declared, the Famine Code was not made mandatory, and the state did not consider famine management in the rural areas of Bengal a pressing demand. Instead, the government sought to contain the famine in rural areas, isolating and protecting Calcutta as the main center of imperial war production. Tens of thousands of famine migrants in the city were removed to 'temporary collecting centres,' where they were given (insufficient) food aid before being returned to the countryside. According to government estimates, over 55,000 people were received in shelters and camps during the relief operation (FIC, 1945). Thousands of troops were deployed to distribute food and monitor food kitchens to control diversion and corruption and to keep order during what could be very chaotic and unruly distributions (Greenough, 1982). During the latter half of 1943, 6,625 food kitchens were providing cooked meals—in November 1943, the Bengal government reported that it was feeding over two million people a day, and providing food assistance to another 257,000; by the time the food kitchens were wound down, an estimated 110 million meals had been given out.

Although the government embarked on a massive vaccination drive, efforts to inoculate the population against the main disease threats—cholera, malaria, and smallpox—came too late to avert large-scale deaths, and work to repair wells and water sources and improve sanitation started only after the epidemics had begun to abate. Drug distribution was inadequate, and an extensive black market in anti-malarial drugs sprang up almost immediately. Doctors recruited for famine work were generally of low quality, with little knowledge of hospital organization. Mortality rates in Bengal's hospitals were extremely high: of the 25,551 famine patients admitted to hospitals in Calcutta, 34% did not survive; in the countryside, 12% of the 203,000 famine admissions died, the lower rate probably a function of the fact that a larger proportion of rural people expired before they got anywhere near medical help.

5.3 Market interventions and rising rice prices

The reluctance to intervene in the market that had dominated nineteenth-century approaches to food scarcity was also evident in the initial response in Bengal. Between 1939 and 1942, the British held six Price Control Conferences, but only in the last meeting, in September 1942, did the government admit the necessity of controlling the food supply. By the end of 1942, a Food Department had been established, but it concentrated on procurement for Calcutta's laborers and did not develop a scheme that included the whole population of Bengal (Mukherjee, 2011; De, 2014). Meanwhile, there was very little cooperation between the two government organizations charged with managing the famine response, the Department of Civil Supplies

(DCS) and the Revenue Department. Theoretically, the DCS had been set up to buy food on the market for resale in government shops and to supply the public works programmes and food doles run by the Revenue Department. In practice, however, the DCS supplied no food for famine relief between October 1942 and April 1943. In an effort to compensate, the Revenue Department also turned to the market, in competition with the DCS, further increasing rice prices, which reached their peak in May 1943. Meanwhile, the Revenue Department concentrated its attentions on districts affected by the October cyclone, and it was not until April the following year that it undertook any form of relief work elsewhere in Bengal. As the Famine Code was not mandatory, what relief was distributed was far below the scale envisioned in the Code.

5.4 Private relief

Considerable private relief supplemented the government's efforts. Non-governmental organizations provided 40 gruel kitchens in Calcutta, and hundreds more were set up in rural districts. Meals were also provided through subsidized canteens and uncooked food was handed out by volunteers. Voluntary organizations involved in the relief response included the Ramakrishna Mission, the Bharat Sewak Sangh, the Friends Ambulance Unit, the Indian Red Cross, and the Marwari Relief Society. The latter ran more than 60 relief centers in Calcutta and the districts, distributing Rs1,430,000 in food, clothing, and medicine. The Indian Red Cross was heavily involved in the distribution of hundreds of tons of dried and evaporated milk, used for the therapeutic feeding of infants and pregnant and nursing mothers, and paid for by a fundraising campaign organized by the Viceroy's wife (Greenough, 1982). According to its own reports, the Ramakrishna Mission started providing relief in June 1943, eventually reaching almost 1,200 villages and 22 towns. At the peak of the crisis at the end of 1942, the Mission was caring for 130,000 people (Ramakrishna Mission, 1944).

5.5 The aftermath of the famine

The Bengal famine became a powerful tool in the hands of opponents of the British colonial regime. As Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first prime minister, put it: "In any democratic or semi-democratic country such a calamity would have swept away all the governments concerned with it" (Nehru, cited in Amrith, 2008: 1,026). The failure of the government to mount an effective response thus became part of the nationalists' demand for independence (Mukherjee, 2011). Indian politicians had used the failure of the British to mitigate famine to challenge the political legitimacy of the colonial regime since the late nineteenth century. From the early twentieth century onwards, actors associated with the Indian nationalist movement themselves organized rapid responses to famines and epidemics in an attempt to strengthen their support. Responding to famine also demonstrated the nationalist movement's ability to govern (Dang, 2014).

Awareness of the political importance of being seen to deal with famine and food insecurity also informed Indian policies after independence in 1947. Key shortcomings of pre-independence famine management, such as the general discomfort with market regulation, selective targeting, and inadequate relief, were replaced by much more generous assistance and efforts to find a

durable solution to the problem of famine. While the Famine Code's emphasis on public works by the poor was retained, substantial food assistance was provided where necessary, and government responses to famines in the decades after independence were notably more successful than anything the British managed (Devereux, 2000; Drèze, 1988). Annual crop failures continued after independence, but in the majority of cases shortages largely affected local enclaves, and the organization of public works as envisaged by the Famine Code proved sufficient to ward off famine. When crop failures affected the whole country (as in 1966–67, 1972–73, and 1979–80), the Indian government broke with colonial practice and organized large-scale imports to guarantee the availability of food, as well as establishing food-for-work programmes and providing relief (Drèze, 1988).

Unlike the colonial state's focus on free trade and the politics of laissez-faire, the political elite in independent India saw centrally planned economic development as an effective way of countering scarcity and poverty. After independence, the Indian government embedded famine relief into a larger strategy intended to ensure permanent food security. This was a clear break with colonial thinking and practice, which felt no obligation to ensure food security or provide poverty relief in any long-term sense. In contrast to earlier views on the limits of state responsibility, the Indian political elite after independence saw food insecurity as a potent and permanent threat and sought multiple ways to deal with the problem.