

INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

With

INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE



A comprehensive chronological roadmap of India's journey from colonial impact to post-independence nation-building, spanning from 1757 through 1964 with **Analytical Depth, Integrated Constitutional Perspective and Concise Summaries**

INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

With
INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE
(1757-1964)



This book

- Presents complex historical events in a structured, exam-oriented format.
- Covers Modern Indian History from the British expansion (1757) to post-independence consolidation (1964).
- Goes beyond facts to explain the causes, processes, and consequences of major historical developments.

Editor

N.N. Ojha

Mentoring Civil Services Aspirants Since 1990

Compiled by

Chronicle Editorial Team

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MODULE 1
British Expansion and Colonial
Impact (1757-1857)

Economic Impact of British Rule in India

When the first English merchant ships anchored off the coast of Surat in 1608, they arrived not as conquerors but as traders seeking spices and silks from a civilisation long celebrated for its wealth and sophistication. Within a century and a half, however, the commercial venture of the East India Company had transformed into full-fledged political dominion, and by the nineteenth century, Britain had come to control virtually every lever of the Indian economy. The story of this transformation is **not merely a tale of military conquest; it is, above all, a story of systematic economic restructuring.**

The economic impact of British colonial rule in India is one of the most debated and consequential subjects in the study of modern history. To assess it honestly requires understanding what India was before colonial domination, tracing the mechanisms through which **British policies altered the structure of the Indian economy**, and reckoning with the long shadows those alterations cast over post-independence development.

At its core, British colonialism in India was an exercise in economic imperialism. India was treated, first and foremost, as a source of raw materials, a captive market for British manufactured goods, and a field for the investment of British capital. All major policies - revenue systems, trade regulations, industrial legislation, and financial arrangements - were calibrated to serve British interests.

As the nationalist economist **Dadabhai Naoroji argued as early as 1871, in his landmark work 'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India'**, the poverty of India was not accidental; it was the direct consequence of deliberate colonial policies that systematically drained the subcontinent of its wealth.

This chapter examines the economic impact of British rule across several dimensions: the transformation of India **from a prosperous, diversified economy into a colonial agrarian economy**; the specific mechanisms of exploitation including deindustrialisation, extractive land revenue systems, the drain of wealth, and the commercialisation of agriculture; and the lasting structural consequences of colonialism that continued to shape India's developmental trajectory long after independence.

Evolution: From Traders to Colonizers (1600-1858)

A. Arrival of European Trading Companies

The English East India Company, chartered by Queen Elizabeth I in 1600, was conceived as a commercial enterprise with one overriding objective: profit.

Popular Movements: Resistance Against Colonial Rule, 1757-1947

Historians usually date the organised national movement to the second half of the nineteenth century. This movement had all-India platforms, structured leadership, and a clear political programme. But for a full century before that, the Indian countryside was rarely calm. From the time the East India Company turned its trading rights into political power, many groups rose against it. **Peasants, tribal communities, artisans, displaced rulers, religious groups and ordinary people resisted the new order again and again.**

These popular movements were mostly local. They were not coordinated with each other. They did not share the political language of later nationalism. Each movement was an **immediate response to an immediate, local grievance**. People lost their land, their customary authority, their livelihood, or their whole way of life. This local and often spontaneous character is what separates popular resistance from the organised nationalist movement. That later movement took shape from the 1870s and 1880s onward. It had its own press, associations, lawyers, and finally a party structure in the Indian National Congress.

Despite their local character, these movements drew on a fairly consistent social base:

- ◆ **peasants** resisting excessive rent or revenue demand;
- ◆ **tribal communities** defending land, forest and customary self-government;
- ◆ **artisans** ruined by the decline of traditional industry;
- ◆ **disbanded soldiers** and dispossessed hereditary office-holders;
- ◆ **religious orders** reacting to interference with custom; and
- ◆ from the late nineteenth century, **organised labour and depressed castes** asserting long-denied rights.

Leadership also varied widely. It included wandering religious mendicants, tribal prophets, deposed princes, hereditary militia commanders, and, in the twentieth century, modern political organisers.

Why 1757–1947?

The year 1757 marks **the Battle of Plassey**. After this battle, the East India Company's trading presence in Bengal quickly turned into territorial rule.

- ◆ From this point on, the Company's administration spread steadily across the subcontinent. It expanded through conquest, subsidiary alliance and annexation.

Revolt of 1857: The First Great Challenge to British Rule

The Revolt of 1857 is a landmark event in modern Indian history. It was the first large-scale challenge to British rule in India. Before 1857, there were **small and scattered protests against the British**. But this revolt was much bigger. It shook the foundations of the East India Company's rule.

Historians do not agree on the exact nature of this revolt. Some call it a mere sepoy mutiny. Others call it a popular uprising. Still others call it the first war of Indian independence. The truth is that the revolt had many sides to it. It was a **mix of military uprising, aristocratic resistance, and popular protest**. To understand it properly, we must look at it against the wider background of nineteenth century India.

Why Did the Revolt Occur?

The revolt did not happen suddenly. It was the result of growing anger among different groups of people. This anger had been building up for many years under Company rule. The causes can be grouped under four heads.

Political Grievances

The British followed an aggressive policy of expansion. They used the "right of conquest" and the "Doctrine of Lapse" to take over Indian states.

- ◆ **States like Punjab and Lower Burma** were taken by conquest.
- ◆ **Avadh** was taken on the excuse of bad administration.
- ◆ **Jhansi, Satara and Nagpur** were taken under the Doctrine of Lapse.
- ◆ **Nana Saheb**, the adopted son of the last Peshwa, was refused his pension after his father's death.

Indian rulers feared that their kingdoms would also be swallowed up one day. This fear spread distrust against the British among the ruling class.

Economic Distress

British rule brought heavy economic exploitation. Wealth was drained out of India, especially from Bengal.

- ◆ **Local industries** were destroyed.
- ◆ The British placed heavy duties on Indian goods sold in Britain. But British goods entered India almost duty-free. This ruined Indian trade and craft.

MODULE 2

**Socio-Religious Awakening and
Rise of Nationalism (1815-1905)**

Socio-Religious Reform Movements and the Rise of Modern India

The nineteenth century in Indian history is often called the period of the Indian Renaissance. During this period, Indian society tried to **recover its lost prestige in the fields of religion, society and education**. Socio-religious reform movements were organised efforts by Indian thinkers and leaders to remove social evils, purify religious beliefs and bring new life into Indian society.

These movements were not simply religious in nature. They touched almost every part of life - religion, caste, education, the status of women, and even politics. Reformers wanted to keep what was good in Indian tradition while removing what was harmful or outdated.

By the nineteenth century, India had come fully under British rule. This rule brought new ideas, new institutions and new ways of thinking. At the same time, Indian society was struggling with many old problems. **Practices like sati, child marriage, polygamy and untouchability had become deeply rooted**. Education was limited to a small section of society, and women had very few rights. It was in this setting that the reform movements began.

The reform movements arose for two reasons together. First, many Indians themselves felt that their society needed change from within. They wanted to remove practices that they saw as unjust or backward. Second, the presence of British rule and Western ideas gave Indians a new lens through which to look at their own society. **Colonial rule, missionary criticism, and Western education all pushed Indian thinkers to question old customs** and to defend or reform their traditions.

English education created a new class of Indians who could read Western books and ideas. This new educated middle class became the main force behind the reform movements. They were the ones who founded reform societies, wrote in newspapers, and pushed for new laws. Without this class, the reform movements could not have taken the shape they did.

Why Did Socio-Religious Reform Movements Emerge?

Impact of Western Education and Modern Ideas

- ◆ The spread of Western education through English language schools and colleges exposed Indians to new ideas. Subjects like science, history and philosophy made educated Indians question old beliefs and customs.
- ◆ Western education also brought scholars known as Indologists, who studied Indian texts and history. Their research uncovered the past greatness of India in fields like philosophy, art and learning, and this made Indian intellectuals proud of their ancient heritage.

Rise of Nationalism in India

Nationalism is the feeling among a group of people that they belong to one nation. It creates a sense of shared identity, shared interests, and a shared future. People who feel this way are willing to act together for the good of their nation, even across differences of religion, region, and language.

Nationalism usually has a few common features. It builds a **sense of unity among people who may otherwise be very different**. It creates loyalty to the nation as a whole, above loyalty to a smaller group such as a caste, region, or religion. It also creates a demand for self-rule, since a nation feels it has the right to govern itself.

In earlier times, people in India were loyal mainly to their local king, their caste, their village, or their religious community. These were traditional loyalties. Modern nationalism is different. It asks people to set these smaller loyalties aside, at least in the political sphere, and to think of themselves as members of one large nation. This kind of nationalism was a new idea in nineteenth century India. Indian nationalism grew under British colonial rule. It did not exist in the same form before British rule began. The shared experience of living under one foreign government slowly pushed Indians from different regions and communities to see themselves as one people with common political problems.

At its core, Indian nationalism was a response to colonial rule. British policies in politics, economy, and society created common grievances among Indians. Out of these shared grievances grew a shared political consciousness, which in time became Indian nationalism.

Uprisings After 1857

The failure of the revolt of 1857 marked a turning point. After this, open armed resistance against the British was no longer the main method of protest, although it did not disappear completely.

The **most famous disturbance of this period was the indigo agitation**, which lasted from 1859 to 1861. Cultivators in Bengal had long suffered under the harsh demands of indigo planters. Dinabandhu Mitra's play "Neel Darpan" showed the cultivators' suffering and the cruelty of the planters, and it moved people across the country. Leaders such as Harish Chandra Mukherjee, editor of the Hindu Patriot, and Sisir Kumar Ghose, founder-editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, took up the cause of the cultivators.

By February 1860, ryots across Bengal felt that freedom from indigo cultivation was close. Factories were burnt, indigo plants destroyed, and factory servants attacked. The Lieutenant-Governor, J.P.

Indian National Congress and the Moderate Phase (1885-1905)

By the 1880s, Indian nationalism had grown beyond an intellectual idea discussed by individual thinkers. It now needed an organised political form. The years before 1885 had already created political consciousness, a sense of common grievance, and some experience of public agitation. What was missing was a single, all-India platform that could bring these scattered efforts together.

Earlier chapters showed how **economic critique, modern education, the press, and social reform created the intellectual roots of nationalism**. These roots now needed a stem to grow on. Political workers across different provinces had been thinking along similar lines, but they were working separately, through local associations. The next step was to bring them together into one organised movement, with shared goals and a shared method of work.

By the mid-1880s, many of the older regional associations had reached the limits of what they could do on their own. Their members increasingly felt that local effort was not enough. India's political problems were the same from region to region, and they **needed a body that could speak for the whole country at once, not just for one province**.

The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, met this need. It became the first organised, all-India political body in India. Its founding marked the beginning of a new and more structured phase of the national movement, often called the Moderate phase, which lasted from 1885 to 1905.

Pre-Congress Political Associations: The Preparatory Phase

Even before the Revolt of 1857, Indians had begun forming political associations. These early bodies prepared the ground on which the Indian National Congress would later be built.

Landholders' Society

- ◆ In March 1838, the Zamindary Association was formed in Bengal.
- ◆ It later came to be known as the Landholders' Society.
- ◆ It was originally set up to protect the interests of landlords, but it also tried to look after the interests of the ryots. Although it achieved little of lasting importance during its short existence from 1838 to 1844, it was later regarded as the pioneer of political freedom in India.
- ◆ Rajendra Lal Mitra later said that the Society gave Indians their first lesson in fighting constitutionally for their rights.

MODULE 3

Assertive Nationalism and Revolutionary Movements (1905–1919)

The Swadeshi Movement

(1903-1911)

‘Swadeshi’ means “of one’s own country.” It stood for the use of goods made in India in place of foreign, mainly British, goods.

‘Boycott’ was its companion idea. It meant the refusal to buy foreign goods, attend government functions, accept government titles, or use government schools, colleges and courts.

Boycott and Swadeshi together formed the main programme of the movement that grew out of the protest against the Partition of Bengal in 1905.

Role of Swadeshi Movement in the History of Indian Nationalism

- ◆ The Swadeshi Movement holds a special place in the history of Indian nationalism.
- ◆ It marks the point where the constitutional and petition-based politics of the Moderates began to give way to a more assertive, mass-based politics.
- ◆ In this sense, the movement formed a bridge between Moderate nationalism and the Assertive, or Extremist, nationalism led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai, popularly called the Lal-Bal-Pal trio.
- ◆ The movement also used many methods that Mahatma Gandhi later adopted on a national scale, such as boycott, swadeshi, national education and passive resistance.
- ◆ For these reasons, the Swadeshi Movement is seen as the first mass-based phase of the Indian national movement and an important link to the later movements of Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience.

Background and Context

The turn of the twentieth century was a period of profound transition in the Indian national movement. As the initial optimism surrounding constitutional reforms faded, a more assertive and militant form of nationalism began to take root, driven by domestic grievances and global shifts.

Political Situation in India during this Era

The Limitations of Moderate Politics and the 1892 Act

- ◆ Since the inception of the Indian National Congress in 1885, the national movement was guided by “Moderate” leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjea, and Dadabhai Naoroji.

Revolutionary Terrorist Movement (1897-1934)

Revolutionary nationalism stood for the use of secret societies, armed action and political violence to end British rule in India. Historians often use the term “Revolutionary Terrorism” for this trend, since its main method was the use of force, including assassinations and bomb attacks, against British officials and informers. This sets it apart from Moderate nationalism, which relied on petitions and constitutional methods, and from Assertive nationalism, which relied on boycott, passive resistance and mass agitation but stopped short of organised violence.

The revolutionary movement occupies an important place in the freedom struggle. It kept alive the spirit of resistance at times when constitutional and Extremist methods had reached a dead end. Though it failed to overthrow British rule and never gained a wide mass base, it added a new and dramatic chapter to Indian nationalism through its acts of courage and sacrifice.

Emergence of Revolutionary Nationalism

Background

- ◆ By the early twentieth century, many young Indians had grown disillusioned with constitutional methods. Leaders such as Surendranath Banerjee, Pandit Malaviya, Gokhale and Dadabhai Naoroji had relied on petitions and prayers, but these brought little real change.
- ◆ **The Partition of Bengal in 1905**, along with famine and plague in Maharashtra, deepened anti-British feeling. Even Extremist leaders such as Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal came to believe that resolutions and agitation, unless backed by force, would not bring India closer to freedom.
- ◆ **The failure and decline of the Swadeshi Movement after 1907**, followed by heavy government repression, convinced many young nationalists that more direct methods were needed.

Ideological Influences

Revolutionary nationalists drew on a mix of ideas:

- ◆ **From Indian tradition**, they took inspiration from the Bhagavad Gita and from the belief that a subject people had to “wade to freedom through a welter of blood.”
- ◆ **From Europe**, they studied the example of Mazzini and Garibaldi in Italy, the Russian Nihilists and the Irish nationalist movement, including the Sinn Féin movement, all of which showed that small groups of determined revolutionaries could challenge powerful states.

Growth of Communalism in India

Communalism, in the Indian context, refers to a political and social outlook that treats religious communities, such as Hindus and Muslims, as separate and often competing political groups, each with its own distinct interests.

Communal consciousness is the sense of belonging to a religious community first, while communal ideology goes further and turns this sense of identity into an active political programme, often defined in opposition to other communities.

Communalism occupies a significant place in modern Indian history, since it grew alongside the national movement and eventually became **one of the most serious obstacles to a united struggle for independence, contributing in the end to the partition of the country in 1947.**

Background to the Growth of Communalism

- ◆ **Socio-Economic Impact of Colonial Rule:** Colonial rule brought significant socio-economic changes to India, including the growth of modern education, the rise of a new professional middle class, and the gradual introduction of representative institutions.
- ◆ **Competition for Limited Resources:** These changes created new opportunities, such as government jobs, seats in legislative councils, and access to higher education, but these opportunities were limited in number.
- ◆ **Emergence of Identity-Based Politics:** As different communities became politically conscious and began competing for the same limited opportunities, religious identity increasingly became a basis for organising this competition.
- ◆ **Emergence of Identity-Based Politics:** The growth of representative politics, in particular, meant that the number of seats or representatives allotted to a community became a matter of direct political importance, encouraging communities to organise and make demands as distinct political blocs rather than as individual citizens.

Factors behind the Growth of Communalism

Socio-Economic Factors

- ◆ **Educational and economic disparities** between communities played an important part in the rise of communal feeling.

Home Rule Movement and the Lucknow Pact (1914 - 1918)

By 1914, the Indian National Congress had still not fully recovered from the effects of the Surat split of 1907, the heavy government repression that had followed the Swadeshi Movement, and the disappointment felt by the Moderates with the limited constitutional reforms of 1909.

Many of the leading figures of the earlier agitation were no longer active: Aurobindo Ghose had retired to a life of spiritual practice in Pondicherry, and Lala Lajpat Rai was away in the United States.

The national movement badly needed fresh leadership and a renewed sense of direction. The Home Rule phase, beginning with the outbreak of the First World War, gave Indian nationalism this new lease of life. It revived political activity after years of stagnation, reunited the divided Congress, and produced, in the Lucknow Pact, a major attempt at Hindu-Muslim political cooperation.

For these reasons, the Home Rule Movement holds an important place as a bridge between the earlier Extremist phase of nationalism and the mass politics that Gandhi was soon to lead.

Background to the Home Rule Movement

Political Conditions in India

- ◆ After 1908, nationalist activity in India had declined sharply. The Surat split had divided the Congress into Moderate and Extremist camps, and government repression following the Swadeshi agitation had removed or silenced many of its most active leaders.
- ◆ **Tilak, on his release from prison in 1914, devoted himself** initially to seeking readmission for himself and other Extremists into the Congress, since he believed that the sanction of this body was necessary for any successful political action.
- ◆ However, the Congress session of December 1914 disappointed him, as Pherozeshah Mehta and the Bombay Moderates, by winning over Gokhale and the Bengal Moderates, succeeded in keeping the Extremists out.
- ◆ It was only at the Congress session of December 1915 that the Extremists were finally allowed to rejoin, setting the stage for renewed political activity.

Impact of the First World War

- ◆ The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 changed the political atmosphere in India considerably.
- ◆ Indian nationalist leaders initially decided to support the British war effort, in the hope that such support would be rewarded with a measure of self-government once the war ended.

MODULE 4

Rise of Gandhian Nationalism (1893–1934)

Mahatma Gandhi: South Africa and the Making of a National Leader

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi occupies a unique place in the history of the Indian national movement. Before he became the central figure of Indian politics, he spent over two decades in South Africa, where he developed the methods and ideas that would later shape the freedom struggle in India. South Africa was the turning point of his life: it was there that a shy, inexperienced lawyer was transformed into a mature political leader with a distinct philosophy of struggle.

To understand the Gandhian era that began in India after the First World War, it is necessary first to understand the man who entered it, and the experiences in South Africa and in early experiments within India that prepared him for the role he was about to assume.

Gandhi before South Africa

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 at Porbandar, in Saurashtra, in present-day Gujarat, into a well-to-do family.

- ◆ **Education and Legal Training:** Gandhi proceeded to England in 1888 to study law, and he returned to India as a barrister-at-law in 1891. His attempts to establish himself as a practising lawyer, first at Rajkot and then in Bombay, were unsuccessful, and it was this lack of success at home that led him, in 1893, to accept work in South Africa as the lawyer for a firm of Porbandar Muslims.
- ◆ **Early Influences on Gandhi's Thought:** Gandhi's later political philosophy drew on Indian religious and ethical traditions, particularly ideas of truth and self-discipline, although it was only later, through his reading of Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau, that these instincts were developed into a fully worked-out philosophy of political action.

Gandhi's Journey to South Africa

Gandhi went to Natal, in South Africa, in 1893 as the lawyer of a firm of Porbandar Muslims. He had not gone there with any political purpose, but his work soon brought him face to face with the conditions under which Indians lived in the colony.

Status of Indians in South Africa

- ◆ In South Africa, Gandhi was deeply shocked by the political and social disabilities imposed upon Indian residents by law, by administrative measures and by the social customs of the European settlers.

Constitutional Reforms and Post-War Politics (1919)

The First World War (1914-18) marked a turning point in the relationship between India and the British Empire. India had supported the British war effort with men, money, and resources, and in return, Indians expected greater political concessions once the war ended. The period from 1914 to 1919 thus became one of rising political expectations, culminating in constitutional reforms that fell well short of nationalist aspirations.

This chapter examines the political, economic, and social context of the war years, the constitutional changes introduced through the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, and the nationalist response to them. It also marks an important transition: the gradual decline of Moderate-led constitutional politics and the emergence of a more assertive, mass-based nationalism associated with Mahatma Gandhi.

India and the First World War

India's Contribution to the War

India contributed substantially to the British war effort. Over one million Indian soldiers served overseas in theatres such as France, Mesopotamia, East Africa, and Gallipoli.

- ◆ **India also provided large financial contributions to the British war chest**, along with supplies of food grains, raw materials, and war equipment. Indian political leaders, including Moderates and even early Gandhian nationalists, supported the war effort in the hope that loyalty would be rewarded with political reforms after the war.
- ◆ **Gandhi himself encouraged recruitment during this period**, believing it would strengthen India's moral claim to self-government.

Economic and Social Consequences

The war placed a heavy economic burden on India. Prices of essential commodities rose sharply due to wartime demand and disruption of trade, leading to widespread inflation.

- ◆ **Heavy taxation was imposed to finance the war**, and forced recruitment in some areas caused resentment among the rural population. Industries producing war-related goods expanded, but the general population suffered from food shortages and economic hardship.
- ◆ **The Influenza epidemic of 1918-19**, which followed close on the heels of the war, caused enormous loss of life and added to the prevailing distress, further alienating the population from colonial rule.

Rowlatt Act & Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

The end of the First World War, instead of bringing political relief to India, was followed by a fresh wave of repression. The passing of the Rowlatt Act in 1919, soon after the limited concessions of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, shattered Indian hopes of being treated as partners in self-government.

The Act, and the brutal massacre at Jallianwala Bagh that followed in its wake, transformed the political atmosphere of the country. This period marks the beginning of Mahatma Gandhi's emergence as an all-India leader and the shift from constitutional protest to mass-based Satyagraha, setting the stage for the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22.

Background

Wartime Restrictions

During the First World War, the colonial government had assumed extraordinary powers to deal with political unrest and revolutionary activity, particularly through the Defence of India Act, 1915.

- ◆ **This Act allowed the government to arrest and detain individuals without trial**, restrict their movements, and curb publications, in the name of wartime security.
- ◆ **These wartime powers were meant to be temporary**, but the government wished to retain similar emergency powers even after the war ended, on the ground that revolutionary conspiracies, especially in Bengal and Punjab, continued to pose a threat.

Sedition Committee (Rowlatt Committee)

To examine the nature of revolutionary and conspiratorial activities in India and to recommend measures to deal with them, the government appointed a committee in 1918 under the chairmanship of Justice Sidney Rowlatt, a British judge.

- ◆ **This committee, commonly known as the Rowlatt Committee or the Sedition Committee**, examined the activities of revolutionary groups in Bengal, Punjab, and Bombay.
- ◆ It recommended that the government be given special powers to deal with political crimes even in peacetime, including the power to try cases without juries and to detain suspects without the normal safeguards of trial.

Government Concerns

The government justified these proposals on the ground that ordinary criminal law and procedure were inadequate to deal with secret revolutionary conspiracies.

Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement (1919-1922)

The years 1920 to 1922 witnessed the first genuinely all-India mass movement in the history of Indian nationalism, led by Mahatma Gandhi under the banner of Non-Cooperation.

Unlike earlier phases of the national movement, which had remained largely confined to the educated middle classes operating through petitions, memorials, and constitutional agitation, the Non-Cooperation Movement drew in peasants, workers, artisans, students, traders, and women across nearly every region of the country.

It was launched in conjunction with the Khilafat Movement, a campaign rooted in Muslim religious sentiment over the treatment of Turkey after the First World War, producing for the first time an unprecedented degree of Hindu-Muslim cooperation in the freedom struggle.

This chapter examines the origins of both movements, their fusion under Gandhi's leadership, the programme and progress of Non-Cooperation, the circumstances of its withdrawal after the Chauri Chaura incident, and its lasting significance for the trajectory of Indian nationalism.

Background

Impact of Rowlatt Act and Jallianwala Bagh

The political climate of 1919 had already been poisoned by the passage of the Rowlatt Act and the subsequent massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, followed by the imposition of martial law in Punjab and the humiliating punitive measures inflicted on its population.

- ◆ These events had convinced wide sections of Indian opinion that the colonial government was neither willing to grant meaningful self-government nor capable of treating Indians with basic justice.
- ◆ **The Hunter Committee's lenient treatment of General Dyer**, the passage of the Indemnity Act shielding officials from prosecution, and the House of Lords' decision to actually commend Dyer's conduct, deepened this sense of betrayal. Gandhi, who had cooperated with the government during the war in the hope of just treatment afterward, found his patience exhausted.

Disillusionment after the War

At the Amritsar session of the Congress in December 1919, presided over by Motilal Nehru, Gandhi had still placed some hope in the Royal Proclamation issued that month, which promised further constitutional progress, and he urged Indians not to expect reform without sustained effort, since under the British constitution "no one gets anything without a hard fight for it."

Swaraj Party and Constitutional Politics

The abrupt withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement in February 1922, following the violence at Chauri Chaura, and the subsequent arrest and imprisonment of Mahatma Gandhi left the Indian National Congress without its towering central leader at a moment of considerable political disarray. The euphoria and momentum that had carried the movement through 1921 gave way to confusion, bitterness, and a sense of drift among nationalist ranks.

It was in this vacuum that a group of prominent Congress leaders, led by Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru, proposed a fundamentally different strategy: rather than boycotting the legislative councils created under the Government of India Act, 1919, nationalists should contest elections to them and use their presence inside the legislatures to obstruct and discredit colonial governance from within.

This chapter traces the political circumstances that gave rise to the Swaraj Party, its objectives and council-entry programme, its activities and achievements in the legislatures, the internal contradictions that eventually weakened it, and its overall significance for the trajectory of the national movement between 1922 and 1927.

Political Situation after 1922

Withdrawal of NCM

Gandhi's decision to call off the Non-Cooperation Movement after Chauri Chaura, however principled in his own understanding, was received by large sections of the Congress leadership and rank and file with bewilderment and dismay.

- ◆ Leaders such as Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose had been unable to comprehend why an entire nationwide campaign should be terminated because of an isolated act of violence in a remote village far from the planned theatre of civil disobedience in Bardoli.
- ◆ With Gandhi's subsequent arrest and conviction in March 1922, sentenced to six years of simple imprisonment, the Congress was left without the one figure whose moral authority had commanded near-universal acceptance across its diverse factions.
- ◆ No other leader possessed comparable standing, and the resulting leadership vacuum left the party directionless at precisely the moment when it most needed a coherent programme to sustain political momentum.

Resurgence of Revolutionary Terrorism (1922-1935)

The withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement in February 1922 and the subsequent imprisonment of Mahatma Gandhi did not bring an end to militant nationalism in India; rather, it opened the door to its revival in a new and more ideologically sophisticated form.

The gloom and disillusionment that spread through nationalist ranks after the collapse of the first mass movement convinced a section of young, educated Indians that constitutional agitation and even disciplined non-violent mass struggle were inadequate responses to colonial rule, and that organised armed action against the state remained necessary.

This phase of revolutionary nationalism, spanning roughly from 1922 to 1935, differed in important respects from the earlier revolutionary terrorism of the Swadeshi period (1905–1911), which had been associated with groups like Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar and had drawn heavily on religious and cultural symbolism, particularly within a Hindu idiom.

The later phase, by contrast, was increasingly shaped by socialist and even Marxist ideas, was more explicitly secular in its self-understanding, and self-consciously sought, through figures such as Bhagat Singh, to redefine revolution as something larger than individual heroic violence.

This phase unfolded alongside, rather than in simple opposition to, the Gandhian mass movements of the period, the Swaraj Party's legislative activities, and the rise of left and communist politics, forming a distinct but interconnected strand of India's struggle for independence.

Background for Resurgence of Revolutionary Terrorism

Political Situation after the Withdrawal of Non-Cooperation

- ◆ **The abrupt suspension of Non-Cooperation** following the Chauri Chaura incident left a deep sense of disappointment among many nationalists, particularly the younger generation, who had thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the movement only to see it called off over what they regarded as a comparatively minor episode of violence.
- ◆ **Gandhi's imprisonment removed the towering figure** whose moral authority had held together the diverse strands of the Congress, and the bitter Swarajist–No-Changer controversy that followed revealed how deeply divided nationalist opinion had become over the correct path forward.

Simon Commission, Nehru Report and Constitutional Debate

By the closing years of the 1920s, the Indian national movement had passed through a complex sequence of phases, from the mass upheaval of Non-Cooperation to the parliamentary obstruction of the Swaraj Party and the parallel resurgence of revolutionary terrorism.

After a period of relative quiet in the mid-1920s, the political atmosphere began to turn decisively in late 1927, when the British Government's handling of the question of constitutional reform once again provided the spark for a renewed wave of nationwide agitation.

The appointment of an all-British Simon Commission, the nationalist effort to draft an agreed constitution through the Nehru Report, and the eventual collapse of consensus along communal lines together defined the constitutional politics of this period and culminated, by the end of 1929, in the Congress's historic declaration of Purna Swaraj, or complete independence, at its Lahore session.

This chapter traces this sequence of events and assesses its lasting significance for the trajectory of the freedom struggle and for the deepening fault line of communal politics.

Appointment of the Simon Commission

The Government of India Act, 1919, had contained a specific provision that, at the end of ten years from its passage, a Royal Commission would be appointed to review the actual working of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and to consider further constitutional advance. On this schedule, such a review was not due until 1929.

- ◆ **However, in November 1927, the British Government appointed the Indian Statutory Commission**, popularly known after its chairman as the Simon Commission, nearly two years ahead of the date contemplated by the Act itself.
- ◆ This premature appointment was widely read in India as an implicit admission by the British Government that the dyarchical system established in 1919 had already failed and required urgent reconsideration, well before its formal ten-year review was even due.

Composition

- ◆ The Commission's membership consisted entirely of British politicians and officials; not a single Indian was included among its members.
- ◆ This all-British composition was condemned across the entire spectrum of Indian political opinion, since it implied that Indians themselves were to have no direct voice in determining the pace

Civil Disobedience Movement & Constitutional Negotiations (1930-1934)

The years 1930 to 1934 represent one of the most eventful and complex phases of the Indian national movement, during which two parallel processes unfolded simultaneously:

- (i) a massive nationwide campaign of civil resistance under Gandhi's leadership, and
- (ii) a sustained, though ultimately inconclusive, effort to negotiate India's constitutional future through a series of Round Table Conferences in London.

The Civil Disobedience Movement, launched through the historic Salt Satyagraha and the Dandi March, represented the second great Gandhian mass movement after Non-Cooperation, and it mobilised an even larger number of participants across an even wider social spectrum than its predecessor.

At the same time, the period witnessed a fundamental constitutional debate over federalism, minority representation, and the relationship between British India and the princely states, a debate that produced the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the Communal Award, and the Poona Pact, and that ultimately laid the groundwork for the Government of India Act, 1935.

This chapter traces the launch and progress of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the constitutional negotiations that ran alongside it, the complex politics surrounding the Communal Award and the Depressed Classes question, and the overall significance of this transformative period for the Indian freedom struggle.

Background to the Civil Disobedience Movement

Political Developments after the Simon Commission

Constitutional Deadlock

- ◆ The constitutional politics of the late 1920s had already exposed deep fault lines in Indian political life.
- ◆ The all-British Simon Commission had been boycotted by the Congress.
- ◆ The Nehru Report's effort to build national consensus on Dominion Status had foundered on the rejection of separate electorates and on Jinnah's Fourteen Points.
- ◆ The resulting communal polarisation made a broadly acceptable constitutional settlement increasingly difficult to imagine.

MODULE 5

Constitutional Developments and Provincial Politics (1935–1939)

Government of India Act, 1935

The Government of India Act, 1935, stands as the single most comprehensive piece of constitutional legislation enacted by the British Parliament for India before independence.

It emerged directly out of the prolonged and turbulent constitutional process of the preceding decade, the failures of dyarchy under the Act of 1919, the sustained pressure exerted by the Civil Disobedience Movement, the inconclusive deliberations of the three Round Table Conferences, and the subsequent parliamentary scrutiny conducted through a White Paper and a Joint Select Committee.

Running to several hundred sections and schedules, the Act represented an attempt by the British Government to construct a constitutional framework elaborate enough to accommodate India's diverse political, religious, and princely interests, while still preserving the essential structures of imperial control.

Although the Act was almost universally condemned by Indian political opinion upon its passage, it nevertheless came to structure the actual working of provincial government for over a decade, and several of its institutional innovations, including the Federal Court, the distribution of legislative powers between different lists, and the basic architecture of provincial autonomy, would leave a permanent imprint on the eventual Constitution of independent India.

This chapter examines the background, objectives, salient features, and historical significance of this landmark, if deeply contested, constitutional document.

Background to the Government of India Act, 1935

Failure of the Government of India Act, 1919

- ◆ **Limitations of Dyarchy:** The Government of India Act, 1919, had introduced the system of dyarchy in the provinces, dividing administration into “transferred” subjects under ministers responsible to the legislature and “reserved” subjects retained under the direct control of the Governor.
 - In practice, this arrangement proved fundamentally unworkable, since Indian ministers in charge of transferred subjects had no real control over provincial finances, which remained with the Governor, and could be overruled by him on a wide range of grounds.
 - **At the Centre, the Act had not introduced even this limited form of responsibility,** leaving the Governor-General and his Executive Council answerable solely to the British Government rather than to the Indian legislature.

Provincial Elections and Congress Ministries (1937-1939)

The period between 1937 and 1939 marks a distinctive and somewhat paradoxical episode in the history of the Indian national movement, an organisation explicitly committed to the overthrow of British rule found itself, for the first time, actually exercising governmental power within the very colonial constitutional framework it had unanimously condemned.

The provincial elections of 1937, held under the Government of India Act, 1935, and the subsequent formation of Congress ministries in a majority of British Indian provinces, represented a significant departure from the politics of boycott and mass civil disobedience that had characterised the preceding decade.

This brief but consequential phase tested the Congress's capacity to combine constitutional governance with continued anti-imperial struggle, provided invaluable administrative experience to a generation of future leaders of independent India, and simultaneously witnessed the dramatic intensification of Muslim communal politics under Jinnah's reorganised leadership of the Muslim League.

The abrupt resignation of the Congress ministries in November 1939, following the outbreak of the Second World War, brought this experiment to a premature close, but not before it had left a lasting imprint on both the practical functioning of Indian self-government and the deepening communal fault line that would shape the subsequent decade.

Background

The Government of India Act, 1935, although its federal provisions never came into operation owing to the princely states' failure to accede in sufficient numbers, did bring its provincial autonomy provisions into actual force, abolishing dyarchy in the provinces and replacing it with a system in which elected ministers were nominally responsible for the entire range of provincial administration.

This provincial scheme, despite its retention of extensive discretionary and special-responsibility powers for Governors, provided the immediate constitutional basis on which elections were to be held and ministries formed from 1937 onward.

The Terms of the Debate

- ◆ The Congress's decision to participate in these elections, and subsequently to accept ministerial office, was preceded by a sharp internal debate over fundamental questions of political strategy.

MODULE 6

National Movement During the Second World War (1939–1945)

National Movement and the Second World War (1939-1942)

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 fundamentally transformed the political landscape of the Indian national movement, drawing it directly into the vortex of a global conflict in which India had been given no voice whatsoever.

The years between 1939 and 1942 witnessed a remarkable sequence of political developments:

- ◆ the resignation of the Congress provincial ministries,
- ◆ a sharply contested internal debate within the Congress over the appropriate response to the war,
- ◆ the limited and carefully calibrated Individual Satyagraha movement,
- ◆ the failed constitutional initiative represented by the August Offer, and
- ◆ finally the equally unsuccessful Cripps Mission of 1942.

Each of these episodes deepened the sense among nationalists that constitutional negotiation with Britain had reached an impasse, while simultaneously sharpening the communal divide as the Muslim League, through the Lahore Resolution of 1940, formally articulated for the first time the demand for a separate Muslim homeland.

By the time Stafford Cripps departed India in April 1942 without having secured any agreement, the stage had been set for the most dramatic and confrontational mass movement of the entire freedom struggle, the Quit India Movement.

This chapter traces this critical transitional period, examining how the pressures of a world war, the obduracy of British constitutional policy, and the widening communal rift combined to push Indian nationalism towards its final and most uncompromising phase.

Background

International Situation

- ◆ **Rise of Fascism and Nazism:** The 1930s had witnessed the steady consolidation of fascist and Nazi power across Europe, with Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler pursuing an increasingly aggressive policy of territorial expansion. Germany annexed Austria in March 1938 and proceeded to occupy Czechoslovakia in early 1939, actions that Britain and France, then pursuing a policy of appeasement, did not actively resist.
- ◆ **Outbreak of the Second World War:** This policy of appeasement collapsed when Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, an act of aggression that finally compelled Britain and

Quit India Movement (1942)

The Quit India Movement of August 1942 represents the final and most dramatic mass confrontation between the Indian National Congress and British colonial rule before independence was finally achieved in 1947.

Launched in the immediate aftermath of the failed Cripps Mission, at a moment when Japanese forces had overrun Burma and stood poised at India's eastern frontier, the movement marked a decisive break from the cautious, calibrated approach that had characterised Congress strategy throughout the preceding three years of war.

Gandhi's call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British power from India, encapsulated in the stirring slogan "Quit India" or "Bharat Chhodo," and his uncompromising declaration that "we shall do or die," unleashed an unprecedented popular upheaval that swept across the country even as virtually the entire senior Congress leadership was swiftly imprisoned.

Though the movement was crushed within a matter of weeks through the most brutal repression yet employed against Indian nationalism, it left an indelible mark on the trajectory of the freedom struggle, definitively establishing that any future negotiation between Britain and India could only concern the manner and timing of the transfer of power, never the question of independence itself. This chapter examines the background, launch, course, suppression, and enduring historical significance of this final great mass movement, often described as the "August Revolution."

Background

Failure of the Cripps Mission

- ◆ The collapse of negotiations between Stafford Cripps and the Congress leadership in April 1942 left Indian nationalist opinion deeply frustrated and embittered.
- ◆ The Congress had rejected the Cripps proposals on the grounds that they offered only Dominion Status rather than full independence, permitted princely states to be represented by royal nominees rather than elected representatives, and most seriously, allowed individual provinces to opt out of the proposed Indian Union, a provision the Congress regarded as effectively inviting the partition of the country.
- ◆ **Gandhi's characterisation of the Cripps offer as a "post-dated cheque" captured the prevailing sense** that British promises, deferred indefinitely into an uncertain post-war future, offered nothing of substantive value in the present crisis.

Indian National Army and Subhas Chandra Bose

While the mainstream of the Indian national movement under Gandhi and the Congress pursued the path of non-violent mass struggle, a distinct and dramatic parallel stream of armed resistance emerged outside India's borders during the Second World War, led by one of the most charismatic and controversial figures of the freedom struggle, Subhas Chandra Bose.

After the suppression of the Quit India Movement in 1942 had left the country in a state of relative political paralysis, with established leaders imprisoned and no new domestic leadership emerging to fill the vacuum, the cause of Indian freedom found a striking new expression abroad through the formation of the Indian National Army (INA) and the Provisional Government of Free India, popularly known as the Azad Hind Government.

Bose's decision to seek Axis support in organising an armed force to liberate India, his escape from internment, his remarkable journey across continents, and the eventual military campaign launched against British forces in Burma and Manipur, together constitute one of the most dramatic and emotionally resonant chapters in the history of India's struggle for independence.

Although the INA's military campaign ultimately failed, its political and psychological aftermath, most visibly demonstrated through the INA Trials of 1945–46, profoundly affected British calculations regarding the sustainability of their continued rule over India.

This chapter examines the rise of Bose, the formation and reorganisation of the INA, the establishment and objectives of the Azad Hind Government, the course and failure of its military campaigns, the subsequent trials and their political reverberations, and the enduring legacy of this distinctive armed dimension of the Indian freedom struggle.

Background

Rise of Subhas Chandra Bose

Early Political Career

- ◆ Subhas Chandra Bose emerged during the 1920s and 1930s as one of the most prominent figures within the Congress.
- ◆ He was particularly associated with the radical and socialist wing of the party, and closely linked with the constructive and political work undertaken in Bengal alongside Chittaranjan Das.

Wavell Plan and Shimla Conference (1945)

By the middle of 1945, the Indian national movement had entered a decisive and final phase. The Quit India Movement of 1942 had been crushed with characteristic British severity, but it had also exposed, beyond any doubt, the depth of popular alienation from colonial rule. The Second World War, which had provided the immediate pretext for the suppression of the movement, was itself drawing to a close, and with its end the entire political and strategic calculus of the British Empire in India underwent a transformation.

The question before the British Government was no longer whether India would attain self-government, but when and on what terms this transfer of power would take place.

It is in this context that the Wavell Plan of June 1945 and the Shimla Conference that followed it must be understood. They represent the first serious attempt, after the failure of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks of 1944, to evolve a workable interim arrangement for the governance of India pending a final constitutional settlement.

The episode is significant not merely as another failed conference in a long series of failed conferences, but because its failure crystallised, with unusual clarity, the central obstacle that would dominate the remainder of the freedom struggle: the unwillingness of the Muslim League under Mohammad Ali Jinnah to function within any arrangement that did not recognise it as the sole representative of Indian Muslims.

This chapter is important on two counts:

- ◆ First, it explains the mechanics of British policy-making in the dying years of the Raj - a policy oscillating between genuine attempts at settlement and the structural compulsions of communal politics that the British themselves had long encouraged.
- ◆ Second, it forms the essential bridge between the Quit India phase and the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, without which the latter cannot be properly contextualised.

Background

End of the Second World War

- ◆ **By 1945, the Second World War was approaching its conclusion.** Germany surrendered in May 1945, and although the war in the Pacific continued until August, the broader trajectory of global politics had already begun to shift. Britain emerged from the war economically exhausted, financially indebted to the United States, and militarily and morally weakened.

MODULE 7
Transfer of Power and Partition
(1946–1947)

Naval Mutiny and the Final Crisis of British Rule (1946)

The closing years of British rule in India were marked not by a single dramatic event but by a cumulative erosion of the foundations on which colonial authority had always rested. By early 1946, it had become apparent that the British capacity to govern India through force, which had been the ultimate guarantee of the Raj since 1857, was no longer assured. The most striking evidence of this came not from civilian agitation, which the Government had decades of experience in managing, but from within the armed forces themselves - the very instrument through which British rule had been sustained.

The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny of February 1946 occupies a place of special importance in this final phase of the freedom struggle. It came in the immediate aftermath of the INA trials, which had already demonstrated the extraordinary depth of popular identification with those who had taken up arms against British authority, and it directly raised the question of whether the loyalty of Indian personnel within the armed forces could still be relied upon.

Taken together with the INA episode and the broader wave of strikes and unrest of 1945-46, the Naval Mutiny exposed what scholars have often called the “crisis of the colonial state” - a situation in which Britain retained nominal sovereignty over India but had lost the practical instruments necessary to enforce it indefinitely.

This chapter is significant for two distinct reasons:

- ◆ First, it illustrates how the transfer of power in 1947 was shaped not solely by negotiations among political leaders and the British Government, but also by autonomous mass action that placed real constraints on the available options before policymakers.
- ◆ Second, it provides a useful case study in the relationship between military discontent, civilian protest, and the timing of major British policy decisions, particularly the dispatch of the Cabinet Mission.

Background

The end of the war in Europe in April 1945 inaugurated a fundamentally altered phase of India's struggle for freedom.

Several structural changes underlay this shift:

- ◆ **The war had decisively altered the global balance of power:** Britain, although nominally among the victors, emerged economically and militarily exhausted, while the United States and

Cabinet Mission Plan (1946)

The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 represents, in the assessment of most historians, the last serious and comprehensive British attempt to transfer power to a single, united India. It was formulated at a moment when the British Government, having already committed itself in principle to Indian self-government, still hoped that a federal arrangement loose enough to satisfy the Muslim League's anxieties about Hindu domination could be devised without resorting to outright partition.

The failure of this attempt, over the course of barely a year between its announcement in May 1946 and the effective breakdown of the interim government it created, set in motion the chain of events that culminated in the Mountbatten Plan and the partition of the subcontinent in 1947.

The Cabinet Mission Plan represents the most elaborate and carefully constructed constitutional scheme attempted by the British in the entire history of constitutional reform in India; more detailed in its federal architecture than the Government of India Act of 1935, and more explicit in addressing the communal question than any previous proposal.

Understanding why so comprehensive a scheme failed is essential to understanding why partition, by mid-1947, had come to appear to both the Congress and the British Government as the only practicable alternative to prolonged civil strife.

Background

The Cabinet Mission Plan did not emerge in a vacuum. It followed directly from the collapse of the Simla Conference of 1945, where Wavell's attempt to reconstitute the Viceroy's Executive Council on a basis of Hindu-Muslim parity had broken down over Jinnah's insistence that the League alone could nominate Muslim members.

That failure had demonstrated that no interim arrangement, however carefully balanced, could succeed so long as the League's claim to exclusive communal representation remained unresolved, and it convinced the British Government that any future initiative would have to engage directly and explicitly with the structural question of how Muslim-majority areas were to be accommodated within, or separated from, a future Indian constitutional order.

Political Situation after the Elections of 1945-46

- ◆ The elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures held in the winter of 1945-46 had transformed the political landscape in ways that made the Cabinet Mission's task considerably more difficult than it might otherwise have been.

Mountbatten Plan, Partition and Indian Independence Act (1947)

The transfer of power in August 1947 was accomplished with a speed that startled contemporaries and has continued to puzzle historians ever since. Lord Mountbatten arrived in India in March 1947 charged with effecting the transfer of power within the timetable announced by Attlee by June 1948 at the latest.

Within barely three months, he had concluded that even this accelerated schedule was too slow, that the Cabinet Mission Plan was, in his own assessment, “a dead horse,” and that the only realistic course was to accept partition and complete the entire process of transfer within ten weeks of his own announcement.

The result was that British rule in India, which had taken nearly two centuries to establish and consolidate, was wound up in a period scarcely longer than a single academic term.

This chapter traces the formulation of

- ◆ the Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947,
- ◆ the process by which the Congress, after years of resisting the very idea of partition, came to accept it as the lesser evil,
- ◆ the mechanics of the actual division of territory and assets, and
- ◆ the constitutional instrument - the Indian Independence Act, 1947 - through which this transfer was given legal effect.

It also addresses the deeply contested question of why Congress leaders who had spent their political lives championing a united India ultimately acquiesced in its division, and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that followed from the haste with which partition was implemented.

Background

Breakdown of the Cabinet Mission Plan

- ◆ By early 1947, the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 1946 lay in ruins.
- ◆ The Muslim League's interpretation of compulsory grouping as the substantive foundation of Pakistan had collided irreconcilably with the Congress's insistence that grouping was optional.
- ◆ Direct Action Day and its aftermath had produced communal carnage on a scale that discredited any expectation of voluntary Congress-League cooperation.

MODULE 8

India after Partition (1947-64)

Political Consolidation and Nation-Building (1947-1952)

Independence, when it arrived at midnight on 14-15 August 1947, did not bring with it a settled, functioning state. It brought instead a vast and diverse territory, freshly amputated by partition, populated by some 340 million people, governed by administrative machinery only partially intact, and confronted simultaneously by communal violence of an almost unimaginable scale, the unresolved question of over five hundred princely states, the absence of an agreed constitution, and a refugee crisis numbering in the millions.

The task before India's first generation of leaders was not merely to govern but to build, in the most literal sense, the institutional architecture of a modern nation-state out of the wreckage and inheritance of colonial rule.

This chapter traces the first five years of independent India's existence, from the trauma of partition through the political integration of the princely states, the framing and adoption of the Constitution, the transition from Dominion to sovereign Republic, and the holding of India's first general elections in 1951-52; an exercise so vast and unprecedented that contemporary observers variously described it as "a leap in the dark" and "an act of faith

Immediate Challenges before Independent India

Partition and Refugee Rehabilitation

Procedural Gap

The Indian Independence Act had laid down a procedure for resolving three major problems flowing directly from partition:

- ◆ the demarcation of boundaries between the two new dominions,
- ◆ the division of the apparatus and personnel of the Indian Civil Services and allied services, and
- ◆ the division of military assets and formations.

None of these processes, however, had been completed with anything resembling adequate preparation, and the resulting dislocation generated a refugee crisis without precedent.

Refugee Issue

- ◆ **Nearly sixty lakh refugees crossed into India from Pakistan**, while a comparable number of Muslims migrated in the opposite direction, in conditions of extraordinary danger and almost complete absence of organised population exchange.

Consolidation of Parliamentary Democracy (1952-1964)

The period between India's first general elections in 1952 and Jawaharlal Nehru's death in May 1964 has come to be known, in recognition of his pervasive influence over the country's political, economic, and institutional trajectory during these years, as the "Nehruvian Era."

Having secured a decisive popular mandate in 1952, Nehru's government turned to the consolidation of the institutions established in the preceding period parliamentary democracy, federal administration, and planned economic development while confronting a series of fresh challenges:

- ◆ the demand for linguistic reorganisation of states,
- ◆ the gradual emergence of organised political opposition,
- ◆ recurring tensions between the Centre and the states, and
- ◆ by the early 1960s, a serious external security crisis in the form of the Sino-Indian War.

This chapter examines these developments and concludes with an assessment of the legacy that the Nehru era bequeathed to independent India.

Evolution of Parliamentary Democracy

Working of Parliamentary Institutions

- ◆ Following the inaugural elections of 1951-52, India's parliamentary institutions settled into regular functioning, with Rajendra Prasad serving as President under a Westminster-style Council of Ministers headed by Nehru as Prime Minister, responsible to the Lok Sabha.
- ◆ **The period witnessed the steady institutionalisation of parliamentary procedure,** committee systems, and the convention of collective cabinet responsibility, even as the Congress's overwhelming numerical dominance limited the practical constraints that organised opposition could impose on the executive.

General Elections of 1957

- ◆ **The second general elections, held in 1957,** returned the Congress to power with another substantial, if marginally reduced, majority, confirming the party's continued political dominance.
- ◆ The elections were notable for the first significant breach in this dominance at the state level: the Communist Party of India, led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, emerged as the largest single party in Kerala and formed a government with the support of independents the first instance anywhere in the world of a communist government coming to power through free, democratic elections.