

Indian Independence 1857-1947

Background

European traders came to India seeking trade with the arrival of Vasco da Gama a Portuguese sailor in 1498 at the port of Calicut. The East India Company was established on 31st December 1600. The Company did business primarily in cotton, silk, saltpeter, indigo, dye, tea and opium. The Company came to govern great areas of India, implementing military command and assuming administrative functions, to the exclusion, slowly, of its business pursuits.

The Battle of Plassey¹ in 1757 was the start of the company rule in India. Here the East India Company led by Robert Clive conquered the Nawab of Bengal and launched itself as a key player in Indian politics. After the Battle of Buxar² in 1765, the company gained control over Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. And after the death of Tipu Sultan³ most of south India also came under direct or indirect control of the company. They defeated the Maratha Empire⁴ in several wars and also conquered Punjab after the Anglo-Sikh⁵ wars and the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. With this literally all of India came under direct or indirect rule of the East India Company.

¹ This battle took place near Palashi in Bengal on the banks of the river Bhagirathi between the Nawab of Bengal Siraj ud Daulah and his French allies and the East India Company. It was waged during the 7 years war in Europe (1756-1763) hence it reflected European rivalries between the French and the British.

² This one took place between the Company and the Nawab of Bengal, Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Oudh and Shah Alam II the Mughal emperor.

³ Also known as the tiger of mysore, he was the son of hyder ali. Between them they faced four wars with the british before being finally defeated. Tipu died in srirangapattana in 1799.

⁴ Of the Chathrapathi Shivaji fame, The Maratha confederacy formed after 1761 consisted of the Peshwas, the Gaekwads, the Holkars, the Scindhia's and the Bhonsales. There were three Anglo-Maratha wars, in 1775, 1803 and 1818

⁵ The Anglo sikh wars that took place in 1845(first Anglo Sikh war) and 1848(second Anglo Sikh war)

In 1835 Thomas Babbington Macaulay who was the first law member of the governor general's council persuaded the governor general to introduce reforms relating to English education in India⁶. Sir William Bentinck formally banned sati in the Bengal presidency⁷. The British also started printing presses in India⁸ and gave the country its vast system of railways⁹. What all this good work did was that it created a feeling of oneness among the Indian masses. News of the hardships caused by the British began to travel throughout the country and this may have been the reason for the rise of nationalist movements against the British. While the composition and appearance of the Indian independence movement varied sometimes stressing on secularism sometimes on Fascism and other times on socialism what can be said is that all of these movements had a common basic ideology of anti colonialism¹⁰.

Rebellion of 1857

The rebellion of 1857 took place in northern and central India. The soldiers of the East India Company grew frustrated by the company's treatment of them. Racial discrimination came into play when promotions or privileges were awarded. Rumors spread that beef and pork which were forbidden to the Hindus and Muslims respectively were used in the pattern 1853 Enfield rifle cartridges which the soldiers had to bite off¹¹. Humiliation of the Peshwas and the Mughals at the hands of the British were other factors

⁶ This chap was also responsible for the Indian penal code 1860, the civil procedure code 1909 and criminal procedure code 1872.

⁷ Although the system was first banned by the British in 1798 in Calcutta only.

⁸ James Augustus Hickey's the Bengal Gazette was the first newspaper

⁹ Railways were first introduced to India in 1853

¹⁰ Chandra Bhan; Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, K.N. Pannikar (1989). India's Struggle for Independence. New Delhi: Penguin Books pp. 521

¹¹ [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+bd0018\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+bd0018)) last visited 13/12/2010

which influenced the rebellion¹².on march 29th Mangal Pandey a sepoy started the rebellion by opening fire on an English officer at Barrackpore. on 10th may the sepoys broke rank , turned on their commanding officer and killed some of them. They approached Bahadur Shah II, a dethroned Mughal emperor and persuaded him to reclaim his throne. he was then proclaimed Shehanshah e Hindustan by the rebels¹³.revolts broke out in Jhansi, Cawnpore and Lucknow as well. Eventually the British reacted with brute force and crushed the rebellion killing the Rani of Jhansi Laxmibai at Gwalior and other prominent freedom fighters such as Tantya Tope and Nana Sahib. The entire rebellion caused a lot of bloodshed on both sides. At the end the Indian empire was created out of the east India company territory and India became a colony of the British Empire coming under direct control of the British parliament with Queen Victoria assuming the title empress of India.

1857-1885

Following the rebellion of 1857 the act for better government of India 1858 made several changes to british administration of India . the east India company was abolished and India was made a colony under direct rule of the british crown . a secretary for the state of India was appointed and a council consisting of 15 members was also appointed all of whom were responsible to the british parliament. A viceroy was appointed in Calcutta and was a representative of the crown in India.

The period between 1857 to 1885 was a period of increasing political awareness among the Indian masses. The Arya Samaj¹⁴ and the Brahmo

¹²Chandra bipan; Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, K.N. Pannikar (1989). India's Struggle for Independence. New Delhi: Penguin Books pp. 34

¹³ Ibid pp31

¹⁴ Founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875

Samaj¹⁵ became more and more important in the socio-religious scenario in India. Men like Rabindranath Tagore, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda , Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Syed Ahmed Khan exhorted the Indian youth to take up the cause of freedom. The rediscovery of india's glorious past was another source of pride and nationalism for the country's youngsters. Dadabhai Naoroji formed the east India association in 1867 and Surendranath Bannerjee¹⁶ formed the Indian national association in 1876. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in a move to emphasize the compatibility of Islamic thought and modern western knowledge started the Aligarh Muslim university earlier known as muhammadan anglo oriental college in 1875. Inspired by the suggestions of a certain Allan Octavian Hume, 73 Indian delegates met in Mumbai in 1885 and formed a party which is relevant till today –the Indian National Congress. At its inception the congress had no particular ideology or much of mass support. At best it could be described as a debating society for rich lawyers and journalists of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and maybe Lucknow which passed resolutions on mundane matters and went to the viceroy with them.¹⁷

1885 The Indian National Congress.

The Indian national congress was founded in 1885 by allan Octavian hume a retired civil servant with the objective of obtaining a greater share of jobs in the government for educated Indians. The initial character of the congress was not anti-establishment. Many in the congress wanted to work within the British government and swore their loyalty to the British crown. Dadabhai Naoroji even became a member of the British House of

¹⁵ Founded by Raja RamMohan Roy among others. he had a huge role to play in the Bengal renaissance which let to social religious and educational advancement of 19th century hindus.

¹⁶ Better known to his british opponents as "surrender-not" Bannerjee

¹⁷ Moore, Robin J. (2001a), "Imperial India, 1858-1914", in Porter, Andrew, Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 422–446

Commons, the first Indian to do so. The first session of the INC was in Bombay and the president was Womesh Chandra Bannerjee. A few years down the line constant opposition from the government and other factors led to radical elements gaining voice in the congress. By 1907 the party was split into two halves the garam dal¹⁸ and the naram dal¹⁹ this split became open in the Surat session of the congress and Tilak and others were forced to leave the congress. A third kind of freedom fighter the revolutionaries also became prominent .but more on them later.

Partition of Bengal 1905

In 1905 the viceroy and governor general lord Curzon divided Bengal purportedly to improve efficiency in administration. However most Indian viewed this as an attempt to stop the revolutionary activities in Bengal and to divide the country on communal lines. widespread protests were taken up throughout the country and the swadeshi movements started. The congress advocated boycotting of British goods. Protests of such nature and extent were unprecedented in colonial India and the British were taken aback they announced the 1909 reforms and also appointed a few moderates to the imperial and provincial councils.the muslims alarmed by Tilaks emphasis on Hinduism started the all India muslim league in 1907.they considered the congress completely unsuitable for the muslims.

World War I

When the british entered the Indian army in the world war there was an unprecedented nationwide political debate calling for independence. The divided congress reunited in lucknow in 1916. Tilak moderated his views

¹⁸ Hot faction , consisting of leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak of the “swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it” fame.this faction advocated overthrow of the british government and direct revolution.Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal formed other important members , together this triumvirate were known as “Lal Bal and Pal”.

¹⁹ The soft faction , this group was headed by the likes of Dadabhai Naoroji who wanted reforms within the british government.

and shared a stage with Gokhale. He along with Gokhale and a young Jinnah formed the Home Rule Movement with Annie Besant. India contributed largely to the British war effort giving up its men and resources in the war. However revolutionary activities were carried on in Bengal and Punjab. From the beginning of the war, expatriate Indian population, notably from United States, Canada, and Germany, headed by the Berlin Committee and the Ghadar Party attempted to trigger insurrections in India on the lines of the 1857 Mutiny with Irish Republican German and Turkish help in a massive conspiracy that has since come to be called the Hindu German Conspiracy. They also attempted to rally Afghanistan against the British. A number of failed attempts were made at mutiny among which the February Mutiny Plan and the Singapore Mutiny are the most well known. Draconian laws and massive counter intelligence operations suppressed the movement. After the war to mollify the Indians the British came up with the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. But then came Gandhi.

The Gandhi years

The rest of the Indian movement for independence is mostly centered on Gandhi. Not because there were no other freedom fighters at the time but because Gandhi was the most popular and loud one among them. Gandhi entered India well known because of his struggles in South Africa where he fought for the rights of South African Indians. His struggles in Champaran and Kheda also were well known and gave him the basic ground on which his later politics was built. But he was seen to have really arrived with the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920.

1920 Non-Cooperation Movement

The British government in 1919 executed the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre where thousands of non-violent civilians were killed. This tragedy shook up the entire nation. In 1919 Gandhiji was elected as the president of the

indian national congress and the all India home rule league. In march 1919 The british government passed though the barbaric rowlatt bills which gave emergency powers to the government and tried to stop revolutionary activities²⁰.

Till now Gandhiji had pondered a *future* satyagraha to obtain what the montague-chelmsford scheme lacked. But the “deadly” rowlatt acts , he felt demanded an immediate response.

Gandhiji knew that neither the congress not the Gujarat sabha was ready to organize a mass movement so he started a new body the satyagraha sabha with himself as the president and sardar patel as the secretary to organize the protest. He travelled through out the country to gather support . and drafted an appeal for non-violent satyagraha starting from 30th march, for wider participation the date was later changed to 6th april. But protestors in delhi felt they should stick to the earlier date.

In delhi on 30th march and elsewhere a week later hindus and muslims joined hands and observed a black Sunday against the black acts. It was the first nationwide protest in indias long history.²¹

Gandhiji called for nationwide boycott of british goods²² councils ²³and british schools ²⁴. Protestors would refuse to buy British goods, adopt the use of local handicrafts, picket liquor shops, and try to uphold the values of Indian honor and integrity. Lawyers emptied the court rooms, students left their schools, government servants gave up their jobs, titles given by the british government were given back. The country came to a stop.

²⁰ Rajmohan Gandhi ,Mohandas the true story of a man his people and an empire, penguin, new delhi,2006 pg 219

²¹ Rajmohan Gandhi ,Mohandas the true story of a man his people and an empire, penguin, new delhi,2006 pg 220-221

²² Mahadev desai ,day to day with Gandhi vol 2, sarva seva sangh,rajghat june 1968, pg 146,213,224

²³ Mahadev desai , day to day with gandhi vol 2,sarva seva sangh, rajghat june 1968, pg 213-214,224,227,228

²⁴ Mahadev desai , day to day with gandhi vol 2,sarva seva sangh, rajghat june 1968, pg 212,226,242,243,245,248

The british government was taken unawares and it was a state of anarchy for a while. And then on February 4th 1922, The chauri chaura incident happened. Protestors in chauri chaura in lucknow set a police station on fire and killed twenty three English policemen.

Gandhiji was shaken by the violence. He feared that the violence would spread. That the Indian masses had not understood his non-violence was evident.

He went on a fast to end the movement and the protests stopped. However he was later arrested by the same government he had saved and put in prison for two years.²⁵

After the non cooperation movement many new voices and parties came into the picture and the field of Indian politics broadened. Young leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, C Rajagopalachari were being heard and new parties such as the communist party, the Hindu Mahasabha , The Swaraj Party and the RSS came into existence.

The rowlatt bills continued to be on the rolls but were never used. As an aside it is amusing to note that the britishers got into so much of trouble for bringing in bills that they would enforce not even once.

Purna swaraj and Dandi march

The recommendations of the simon commission were unacceptable to all Indians.

At midnight December 31st 1929, the Indian national congress headed by Gandhiji and Nehru issued a declaration of independence or purna swaraj on 26th march 1930.

²⁵. Rajmohan Gandhi ,Mohandas the true story of a man his people and an empire, penguin, new delhi,2006, pg 240-267

Gandhiji was chosen to oversee the protests. He chose, most interestingly, salt as his weapon. The 1882 salt act gave the british government monopoly over salt. No one could manufacture it except the british government. It was not a great contributor to her majesty's treasury but was one of the symbols of british rule in India. Everyone in India, no matter how poor, used salt. Gandhiji chose this so that he could involve even the poorest man in his struggle. It was a masterstroke.

Gandhiji also laid before the viceroy a list of seven demands. Which , The viceroy chose not to respond to. Gandhiji announced that he would march from his ashram in Sabarmati to dandi in Gujarat and make salt. Non-violent protests were organized from 12th march onwards.

Mass civil disobedience spread over India with people making and selling salts illegally.²⁶ In reaction the british government jailed over 60,000 people before the month end²⁷. Soon the movement went beyond just salt and british clothes were boycotted, forest laws disobeyed,land revenues not paid,the british responded with more laws and censorship but the movement would not slow down.

Gandhiji began his march from Sabarmati on march 12th and reached dandi and made salt on April 6th , a symbolic date as precisely two years before innocents had been slaughtered at jallianwallah bagh. Throughout Gandhiji issued statements to the press and kept the whole world involved. For the first time many women took part in a mass disobedience movement in India. ²⁸

But his non-violence was not yet learned. There were outbreaks of violence in Calcutta. Unlike in 1920 this time gandhiji was unmoved. He asked for

²⁶ Dalton,selected political writings,Hackett publishing company, 1996, p. 72.

²⁷ Homer jack,the Gandhi reader; a sourcebook of his life and writings,grove press,1994, p 238-239

²⁸ Rajmohan Gandhi , Mohandas a true story of a man his people and an empire, penguin, newdelhi, 2006, pg 325-347

the violence to end , but congratulated the parents of the boys killed in Chittagong as he thought their sons had behave as warriors, with bravery.²⁹ This civil disobedience continued until 1931 when gandhiji was released from prison and called to England to hold talks with lord Irwin on an equal footing.these talks would later lead to round table conferences held in England.³⁰

Civil disobedience and after

In March 1931, the Gandhi Irwin pact was signed, and the government agreed to set all political prisoners free (Although, some of the key revolutionaries were not set free and the death sentence for Bhagat Singh and his two comrades was not taken back which further intensified the agitation against Congress not only outside it but within the Congress itself). In return, Gandhi agreed to discontinue the civil disobedience movement and participate as the sole representative of the Congress in the second Round Table Conference, which was held in London in September 1931. However, the conference ended in failure in December 1931. Gandhi returned to India and decided to resume the civil disobedience movement in January 1932.

For the next few years, the Congress and the government were locked in conflict and negotiations until what became the government of India act 1935 could be hammered out. By then, the rift between the Congress and the Muslim League had become unbridgeable as each pointed the finger at the other acrimoniously. The Muslim League disputed the claim of the Congress to represent all people of India, while the Congress disputed the Muslim League's claim to voice the aspirations of all Muslims.

The government of India act and elections

²⁹ Stanley wolpert,gandhis passion:the life and legacy of mahatma Gandhi, oxford university press,2001, pg 149

³⁰ Dalton,selected political writings,Hackett publishing company,pg 73

The government of India act 1935, the final constitutional effort at governing British India, articulated three major goals: establishing a loose federal structure, achieving provincial autonomy, and safeguarding minority interests through separate electorates. The federal provisions, intended to unite princely states and British India at the centre, were not implemented because of ambiguities in safeguarding the existing privileges of princes. In February 1937, however, provincial autonomy became a reality when elections were held; the Congress emerged as the dominant party with a clear majority in five provinces and held an upper hand in two, while the Muslim League performed poorly.

In 1939, the Viceroy Linlithgow declared India's entrance into World war II without consulting provincial governments. In protest, the Congress asked all of its elected representatives to resign from the government. Jinnah the president of the all India muslim league, persuaded participants at the annual Muslim League session at Lahore in 1940 to adopt what later came to be known as the Lahore resolution, demanding the division of India into two separate sovereign states, one muslim, the other hindu ; sometimes referred to as the two nation theory. Although the idea of pakistan had been introduced as early as 1930, very few had responded to it. However, the volatile political climate and hostilities between the Hindus and Muslims transformed the idea of Pakistan into a stronger demand.

Revolutionary activities

Armed rebellion against the British government was not organized until the late 19th century. the first steps to organize the revolutionaries were taken by aurobindo ghosh and his brother when they started the jugantar party. jugantar was started as an inner circle of the anushilan party which

had the guise of a fitness club. They recruited young men and women throughout the country and especially in Bengal and looting and murders were done many revolutionaries were captured and imprisoned. among the more notable incidents of revolutionary activities were the alipre bombing and the muzzaffarpur killings where several people were tried and Khudiram Bose was hanged. in 1912 Rash Behari Bose took part in what was called the Delhi-lahore conspiracy where he planned to kill the viceroy of India Charles Hardinge.

After the first world war in 1920's some revolutionary activity took place with the Hindustan socialist republican association formed by bhagat singh, Chandrashekhar Azad and Batukeshwar Dutt. They threw a bomb inside the legislative assembly on 8th april 1929. Following the trial Bhagat Singh , Sukhdev and Rajguru were hanged in 1931³¹.

Allama Mashiriqi formed the Khaksar tehreek to direct muslims toward revolutionary activities.

Surya sen along with others raided the Chittagong armory in 1930 to destroy the government communication system and capture arms and ammunition³². Among others prtilata waddedar led an attack on the European club in Chittagong in 1932 and bina das tried to kill Stanley Jackson, the governor of Bengal in the convocation hall of the Calcutta university.

Following trial surya sen was hanged and others were deported for life to the cellular jail in andamans

³¹ The legend of bhagath singh, rang de basanti ..you all know the story.

³² Khelein hum jee jaan ke is based on this I am told.

The Bengal volunteers started operating in 1928. In December 1930 the Benoy Badal Dinesh trio of the party killed Col. N.S. Simpson, the inspector general of prisons in the secretariat writers building in Calcutta.

In 1940 Udham Singh shot Michael Dyer in London. However, toward the end of 1930's revolutionary activities gradually declined.

World War II, Quit India, INA

The British unilaterally without even consulting the Indians made India a party to the world war on the side of the allies. In reaction the entire Congress resigned from the government councils. Two movements for Indian independence came about this time. The Azad Hind movement of Subash Bose and the Quit India movement that Gandhiji started after the failure of the Cripps mission.

Quit India movement-bharath chhodo

In 1942 Indians were still divided over whether or not to support the British war effort in the second world war. The British governor-general of India Lord Linlithgow (later Lord Halifax) had brought India into the war without consulting Indian leaders. Some people wanted to support the war and hope for independence. Others were angry because they felt the British had disregarded Indian intelligence. The Congress, in 1939, passed a resolution which supported war on the condition of independence. Gandhiji had not supported this as he was against war and for non-violent resistance. However he later changed his stance as he did not want to free India by putting the British at an unfair disadvantage.

In March 1942 the Cripps mission headed over to India to talk with Indian leaders and work out a possible compromise for full fledged support in

war in exchange for self-government. But the mission failed as demands for time frame toward self government and definition of powers was not met.³³

On July 14th 1942 the congress passed resolutions demanding independence at the cost of massive civil disobedience. But not all were happy within the party, many felt that the movement was too premature, others wanted to bargain with the british like the hindu mahasabha or the muslim league. On August 8th the quit India resolution was passed at the Bombay session of the congress.

This time the british acted more swiftly and imprisoned Gandhiji at the Aga Khan Palace the next day. All prominent congress men were arrested and put in Ahmednagar Fort Jail. The movement lost direction as all the leaders were in jail. The congress party was itself banned.

Violence broke out in a big way bombs were exploded, buildings set on fire, telegraph lines cut. Over one lakh arrests were made nationwide. Protestors were publicly flogged. Hundreds were killed in police firing.³⁴

Gandhiji went on a 21 day fast against the violence. His health petered out and he was about to die in 1944 when the scared british government released him.

However the movement was soon suppressed by the british government. A feeling of hopelessness spread among the nationalist leaders. By the end of 1944 the movement had died out.³⁵

Indian national army

³³ Barkawi, Tarak. Culture and Combat in the Colonies. The Indian Army in the Second World War. J Contempt History. Pg 325-355

³⁴ D, Fisher D; Read A (1998). The Proudest Day: India's Long Road to Independence. WW Norton. pg. 330.

³⁵ . Rajmohan Gandhi ,Mohandas the true story of a man his people and an empire, Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pg 450-519

Bose was against the way the British had included India in the war. He had been the president of the INC in 1938 and in 1939. After lobbying against the war in 1939 he resigned from the party and started the forward bloc. Bose was put under house arrest by the British government when the war broke out but he escaped and made his way to Afghanistan through Germany to seek Axis help to raise an army to fight the Raj. He raised the Free India Legion. Bose made his way to Japanese South Asia and formed the Azad Hind Government and started the Indian National Army with Indian prisoners of war with the help of the Japanese. The INA saw action against the allies in Arakan, Burma and in Assam. During the war the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were captured by the Japanese and handed over to the INA. Bose renamed them Shahid and Swaraj.

The INA would ultimately fail because of disrupted logistics, poor arms and supplies and lack of support and training. Following the surrender of Japan, INA troops were brought into India and charged with treason. But Bose had captured the public's imagination and turned the inclination of native soldiers of the British Indian forces from one of loyalty to the crown to support for the soldiers that the Raj deemed as collaborators.

These were the major movements in what can broadly be called the Indian national struggle for independence.

After the second world war ended the Indians won their freedom and India became a free country on 15th August 1947, Pakistan became free on 14th August. And what happened later...all that's another story

CG.