

MODERN INDIA I

Company Rule and the Colonial State

Conquest, Economy, Society, and the Rise of Nationalism
to 1919

Gaurav Tiwari

INDIAN HISTORY LIBRARY

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Nationalism to 1919

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This book is an independently written educational synthesis. Historical claims and interpretations should be read with the source note and selected bibliography at the back of the book.

Dedication

For the reader learning to separate a date, an explanation, and an argument about the past.

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Preface

Modern Indian history is often taught as 2 parallel lists. One records governors-general, battles, laws, and administrative changes. The other records reformers, associations, movements, and nationalist leaders. The separation makes revision easier for a week and understanding harder for years.

This volume puts the lists back into one historical process. Company conquest changed access to revenue. Revenue changed armies and administration. Colonial law, education, communications, trade, and classification created new capacities while preserving hierarchy and extraction. Resistance, reform, and nationalism developed inside those contradictions rather than outside them.

The opening chapter matters because historical evidence is not a transparent window. Official records reveal the colonial state and also carry its categories. Nationalist, Marxist, Cambridge, subaltern, feminist, and postcolonial approaches ask different questions of the same archive. The best explanation often begins by noticing what 1 framework can show and what it leaves in shadow.

Read the chapters in sequence once. Then return through the companion sections and ask whether you can explain the mechanism without leaning on the date list.

How to use this book

Read the main chapter before opening its companion. On the first pass, follow causation, institutions, and changes in political scale. On the second pass, close the narrative and rebuild the chronology, comparison, or map from memory. Use the answer key only after committing to an answer.

Names and dates are necessary, but they are not the book's organizing principle. Keep asking what changed, what caused it, who carried it, and what survived.

Part I

Conquest and the eighteenth-century transition

Reading Evidence and Historical Arguments

Primary evidence was produced during the activity or period being studied; **secondary interpretation** reconstructs and explains that past later.

Official records reveal administrative priorities and decision-making, but often see society through categories created for taxation, policing, law and control.

What counts as historical evidence

Evidence becomes meaningful only after contextual criticism. A revenue report, nationalist speech, peasant memory and political cartoon may all concern the same conflict, but each was produced for a different audience and purpose. A useful classification is:

Category	Typical examples	What it reveals	Main limitation
Official and administrative records	Departmental proceedings, correspondence, surveys, censuses, gazettes	Policy formation, categories of rule, official priorities	Institutional bias; governed people appear through official classifications

Category	Typical examples	What it reveals	Main limitation
Company and commercial records	Directors' minutes, factory records, accounts, business papers	Trade, investment, prices, contracts, institutional decisions	Commercial interests dominate; informal and subsistence activity is under-recorded
Judicial records	Petitions, depositions, wills, probate, judgments	Conflict, property, family, language and social relations	Testimony is shaped by legal questions, translation and unequal access to courts
Private papers	Letters, diaries, organizational files, family collections	Motive, networks, strategy and personal experience	Survival favours literate and powerful families
Newspapers and journals	Editorials, reports, advertisements, letters	Public debate, political vocabulary, association and everyday life	Partisan selection, censorship, uneven readership and urban bias
Memoirs, biographies and travel accounts	Autobiographies, official reminiscences, missionary and traveller narratives	Observation, self-understanding and contemporary perception	Memory, self-fashioning, exoticism and retrospective justification
Oral testimony	Interviews, community memory, songs and reminiscence	Experiences of people poorly represented in written records	Later events reshape memory; individual memory cannot stand for a whole group
Literature and visual material	Novels, poetry, paintings, cartoons, photographs and posters	Emotion, moral worlds, stereotypes, aspiration and political symbolism	Representation is crafted; an image or fictional scene is not direct reportage

Primary does not mean unbiased, and official does not mean true. A document may reliably show what an official wanted,

feared or classified even when its description of the governed population is distorted. Likewise, a memoir may be factually imprecise but valuable for studying how an actor later constructed an identity.

The archival landscape

The National Archives of India preserves major Government of India series organized by administrative branch, including public, revenue, political, military, commercial, judicial and educational departments. State repositories preserve provincial records, absorbed princely-state papers and collections of earlier Indian polities. The Peshwa Daftar in Pune is crucial for Maratha administration; Khalsa Darbar papers illuminate Lahore before annexation; Rajasthan, Jammu, Gwalior, Indore, Bhopal, Mysore, Travancore and Cochin retain regionally specific state materials.

The three presidency record systems provide different spatial windows. Bengal papers are especially continuous after Plassey, Madras proceedings trace Fort St. George and southern conflicts, and Bombay materials illuminate western India, Sindh and Kannada-speaking districts once administered from Mumbai (Bombay). Portuguese papers in Goa, Dutch records connected with Kochi (Cochin) and Chinsurah, French material relating to Chandannagar and Puducherry (Pondicherry), and Danish records relating to Tharangambadi (Tranquebar) and Serampore prevent British activity from becoming the only European perspective.

Foreign repositories preserve papers generated by imperial networks. India Office records include Company and Board of Control proceedings; French, Dutch, Danish and Portuguese repositories preserve their respective imperial correspondence. Collections in present-day Pakistan are indispensable for Punjab, Sindh, the north-west and relations with Afghanistan and Iran. Modern political borders must not determine the evidentiary geography of a shared subcontinental past.

How to evaluate a claim

A disciplined evaluation uses five tests:

1. **Provenance:** Who created the record, when, where and in what institutional role?
2. **Purpose:** Was it meant to tax, persuade, defend conduct, mobilize, entertain, remember or adjudicate?
3. **Position:** What power, class, caste, gender, religious or regional location shaped the observer?
4. **Silence:** Who could not speak, who was translated, and what activity left little paperwork?
5. **Corroboration:** Do independent records, material evidence, statistics and testimony support or complicate the claim?

Quantification does not remove interpretation. Census categories, production estimates and mortality totals depend on definitions, coverage and administrative capacity. A precise number can create false confidence if its collection process was weak. Conversely, disagreement among records is often historically revealing: it may expose conflict over classification, authority or memory.

Colonial and imperialist interpretation

Colonial historiography was connected to governance. James Mill divided Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods, a scheme that made religion the defining principle of earlier eras and positioned British rule as a new stage. Mountstuart Elphinstone and Vincent Smith differed in detail, but colonial narratives commonly shared several propositions:

- India lacked durable political unity before British rule.
- society was static, irrational or trapped by caste and custom;
- political conflict resulted from indigenous incapacity rather than material interests and state formation;
- British rule provided order, law, unity and progress;
- successful conquerors and administrators were the principal

historical actors.

These propositions helped normalize hierarchy through Orientalist classification, Social Darwinism, the “white man’s burden” and *Pax Britannica*. Their administrative detail remains useful, but their categories and moral conclusions require scrutiny. Colonial knowledge did not merely describe India; surveys, censuses and legal codes also helped reshape the society they classified.

Nationalist interpretation

Nationalist analysis arose in confrontation with imperial claims. Dadabhai Naoroji, R. C. Dutt, M. G. Ranade, G. V. Joshi, K. T. Telang, G. K. Gokhale and D. E. Wacha used budgets, trade statistics and administrative reports to expose drain, discriminatory expenditure and economic subordination. Political actors such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Pattabhi Sitaramayya produced influential narratives, while R. C. Majumdar and Tara Chand became prominent historians of modern India.

The approach established three durable insights: colonialism formed a structured system rather than a collection of individual abuses; anti-imperialism created a widening political community; and economic criticism educated people into nationalism. Its danger is retrospective unity. If the nation-state is treated as history’s inevitable destination, conflicts of caste, class, gender, religion and region can appear secondary or illegitimate. Partition, Dalit politics, peasant autonomy and women’s unequal citizenship then become deviations from a seamless national story rather than constitutive problems.

Marxist interpretations and their revisions

Marxist history made production, class, colonial exploitation and social transformation central. R. Palme Dutt treated nationalist

leadership as bourgeois and emphasized its tendency to contain class struggle. A. R. Desai related successive phases of nationalism to the social groups that sustained them. This opened the national movement to political-economic explanation but could reduce ideology and culture to reflections of class.

Later Marxist work became more flexible. Sumit Sarkar distinguished elite and popular levels while examining their interaction rather than treating either as sufficient. Bipan Chandra separated the **primary contradiction** between colonial rule and the Indian people from **secondary contradictions** within Indian society. In this view, nationalism built a multi-class hegemony by negotiating internal conflicts, yet it never resolved all of them. The formulation explains both the breadth of the anti-colonial coalition and the persistence of social inequality.

Cambridge School: locality, patronage and collaboration

The Cambridge School shifted attention from ideology to local political competition. Colonial government depended on Indian collaborators; expanding councils and elections encouraged local leaders to assemble client networks, bargain for patronage and link local factions to provincial and all-India arenas. This approach usefully warns against reading every local dispute as pure ideological nationalism and demonstrates that institutions create incentives.

Its strongest version makes ambition and patronage explain nearly everything. Tapan Raychaudhuri criticized this reduction of political life to “animal politics.” Material benefit and conviction can coexist; collaboration may be tactical, unstable or transformed by mass pressure. Locality therefore qualifies an all-India narrative but does not prove that anti-imperialist ideology was unreal.

Subaltern and postcolonial interventions

Ranajit Guha argued that colonial, nationalist and much Marxist history shared an elitist bias. Peasants and other subordinated groups possessed political languages and capacities not derived wholly from elite leaders. Elite and subaltern domains interacted, but popular mobilization could exceed, reinterpret or reject the programme imposed from above. Guha's phrase "dominance without hegemony" captured the failure of both colonial rulers and nationalist elites to secure complete consent.

Subaltern Studies later moved from class and insurgency toward community, culture, consciousness and colonial discourse. Sumit Sarkar criticized this shift as a decline of the material subaltern, while Dipesh Chakrabarty argued that dominant groups could also possess a subaltern past under colonial power. The debate is a reminder that recovering language and subjectivity must not erase land, labour and coercion.

Partha Chatterjee initially described colonial nationalism as different yet derivative from Western political modernity. He later distinguished an outer material domain, where colonial institutions constrained nationalist action, from an inner spiritual domain in which a culturally distinct nation claimed sovereignty before political independence. Gyan Prakash challenged a rigid separation: the national community and nation-state were interconnected forms of the same hegemonic project. Prasenjit Duara's critique of teleology adds a further warning: the eventual nation-state should not be projected backward as the only possible outcome.

Feminist and gender history

Feminist work first recovered women missing from established narratives, then moved toward gender as a relation of power. It asks how inheritance, property, marriage, labour, education, sexuality, law and political representation structured different women's lives. It also questions the nationalist division between

a protected cultural “inside” and a modern political “outside.”

Pandita Ramabai’s *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* combined critique of caste patriarchy with reform advocacy. Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* also focused on women and social practice, but used them to condemn Indian fitness for self-rule. Similar subject matter thus carried opposed politics. Gender analysis must also avoid treating “Indian women” as a single category: caste, class, region, religion, age and marital status altered both constraint and agency.

Communal, liberal and plural interpretations

Communal historiography treats Hindus and Muslims as internally unified, permanently hostile communities whose political interests flow from religion. It inherits the colonial periodization of Hindu, Muslim and British eras and converts contingent conflicts into an ancient antagonism. A sound analysis instead asks when political institutions, representation, economic competition and organized propaganda hardened community boundaries.

Liberal and neo-liberal historians such as Patrick O’Brien, A. G. Hopkins and Peter Cain question whether empire benefited the British population uniformly. Overseas markets and capital exports could privilege particular financial and commercial interests while diverting domestic investment. This does not cancel colonial exploitation in India; it disaggregates “Britain” and identifies who gained, who paid and through which mechanism.

Plural interpretation avoids both a seamless nation and wholly separate political worlds. India contained competing identities and visions of freedom that converged at particular moments without disappearing. The analytical task is to explain intersection: when did caste reinforce class, when did religious solidarity cross economic division, and when did local interests acquire an all-India anti-colonial language?

Interpretations and debates

Was the nation already present?

C. A. Bayly identifies precolonial territorial consciousness, ethnic government and regional patriotisms that formed a prehistory of nationality. Partha Chatterjee instead emphasizes how colonial modernity structured the political form and language of nationalism. Prasenjit Duara warns that the final nation-state must not be treated as the inevitable unfolding of an ancient essence. A balanced view recognizes earlier solidarities without equating them with a modern sovereign nation.

Was nationalism an elite project or a popular movement?

The Cambridge School emphasizes elite competition and patronage. Early Marxist interpretations identify bourgeois direction. Ranajit Guha separates elite nationalism from autonomous subaltern politics. Bipan Chandra treats the movement as a broad anti-imperialist coalition containing unresolved social contradictions, while Sumit Sarkar focuses on interaction between elite and popular levels. Evidence varies by campaign and locality; one fixed answer cannot cover 1885-1947.

Can official evidence recover popular experience?

Official records often preserve the most detailed account of rebellion because policing generated paperwork. Yet the categories of “criminal,” “tribe,” “mob” or “fanatic” embed official judgment. Judicial testimony, local-language print, oral memory and material context can recover different motives, but none is automatically pure. Triangulation is the method, not the assumption that non-official evidence is inherently accurate.

Does adding women correct male-centred history?

Recovery is necessary but insufficient. Feminist history shows that gender shaped institutions themselves: property law, education, labour, household authority, reform and citizenship. The question changes from “Which women participated?” to “How did a gendered political and social order distribute power?”

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1767	James Rennell became the first Surveyor General of Bengal	Colonial mapping joined geographical knowledge to taxation, warfare and territorial control.
1780	James Augustus Hicky began the <i>Bengal Gazette</i>	Early print created a new evidentiary record of criticism and public controversy.
Nineteenth century	James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone and Vincent Smith shaped colonial historiography	Their narratives often linked British authority to unity, order and progress.
1870s-1900s	Dadabhai Naoroji, M. G. Ranade, R. C. Dutt and others developed an economic critique of colonialism	Nationalist analysis converted fiscal and trade data into an argument about exploitation.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1887	Pandita Ramabai published <i>The High-Caste Hindu Woman</i>	Gender, caste and patriarchy became subjects of transnational political argument.
1907	The Home Political record series began	The colonial state increasingly classified nationalist and communal politics as a distinct security field.
1940	R. Palme Dutt's <i>India Today</i> appeared	It became a major Marxist interpretation of colonialism and nationalism.
1948	A. R. Desai published <i>Social Background of Indian Nationalism</i>	It linked phases of nationalism to social classes and changing material conditions.
1970s	Women's studies expanded in India	Research moved from adding notable women to analysing gendered structures and experience.
1982	Ranajit Guha edited the first <i>Subaltern Studies</i> volume	It challenged elite-centred colonial and nationalist narratives.
1983	Sumit Sarkar published <i>Modern India, 1885-1947</i>	It combined material analysis with attention to ideology, popular action and internal tension.
1989	Bipan Chandra and colleagues published <i>India's Struggle for Independence</i>	It framed nationalism as a broad popular movement containing primary and secondary contradictions.
1993	Partha Chatterjee published <i>The Nation and Its Fragments</i>	It reworked the relationship between colonial modernity, elite nationalism and cultural sovereignty.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1998	C. A. Bayly published <i>Origins of Nationality in South Asia</i>	It traced precolonial traditions of territoriality and public morality without assuming a ready-made nation-state.

High-confusion comparisons

Approach	Main unit of analysis	Strongest contribution	Typical blind spot
Colonial/imperialist	State, ruler, administrator	Administrative detail and institutional chronology	Justification of hierarchy; Indian stagnation and British progress assumed
Nationalist	Nation and anti-imperialist movement	Colonial exploitation, political unity and agency	Internal conflicts may be subordinated to unity
Marxist	Class, production and colonial political economy	Material structures and social interests	Culture, identity and political ethics may become secondary
Cambridge School	Local faction, patronage and collaboration	Institutional incentives and local networks	Ideology and mass commitment can be reduced to ambition
Subaltern	Subordinated groups and autonomous popular politics	Recovers agency outside elite direction	Separation of elite and popular domains can be overstated
Feminist/gender	Gendered power intersecting with caste, class and community	Transforms analysis of law, work, household and politics	An additive “notable women” approach misses structures

Approach	Main unit of analysis	Strongest contribution	Typical blind spot
Postcolonial	Discourse, knowledge, culture and subjectivity	Shows how colonial categories shaped modern politics	Material extraction and class can recede from view
Communal	Religious community	Identifies organized religious politics	Treats communities as timeless, uniform and necessarily hostile

Self-test

1. What is the difference between primary evidence and secondary interpretation?
2. Why can an inaccurate official description still possess historical value?
3. Name four tests used to evaluate a historical claim.
4. What did James Rennell's appointment in 1767 symbolize?
5. What core claims characterized colonial historiography?
6. How did nationalist economic critics use colonial data against colonial rule?
7. Distinguish R. Palme Dutt's early Marxist emphasis from Bipan Chandra's formulation.
8. What does the Cambridge School explain well, and what does it tend to understate?
9. What did Ranajit Guha mean by autonomous subaltern politics?
10. How did feminist history move beyond the recovery of notable women?
11. Why is communal historiography methodologically weak?
12. Compare Bayly, Chatterjee and Duara on the making of the nation.

Answer key

1. Primary evidence was created during the activity or period examined; secondary interpretation later selects, contextualizes and explains such evidence.
2. It may reliably reveal official categories, aims and fears even when its account of the governed population is prejudiced or factually wrong.
3. Provenance, purpose, positionality, silence and corroboration; any four with explanation are sufficient.
4. It symbolized the union of mapping, territorial knowledge, revenue administration and military control.
5. Indian disunity and stagnation, Western superiority, British-created unity, the civilizing mission and *Pax Britannica*.
6. Naoroji, R. C. Dutt and others converted budgets, trade figures and expenditure records into evidence of drain and structural exploitation.
7. Dutt stressed bourgeois leadership containing class struggle; Chandra emphasized a primary anti-colonial contradiction within a multi-class movement that also contained unresolved internal contradictions.
8. It explains locality, institutions, patronage and collaboration well but tends to understate ideology, ethics and genuine mass commitment.
9. Subordinated people could organize through political languages and objectives not simply transmitted by nationalist elites.
10. It began analysing gender as a structure shaping property, law, labour, household power, reform and citizenship.
11. It treats internally diverse religious communities as timeless, uniform and inevitably hostile, neglecting institutions and changing material interests.
12. Bayly traces precolonial territorial and ethical traditions; Chatterjee emphasizes nationalism's formation within colonial modernity; Duara warns against projecting the eventual nation-state backward as inevitable.

Closing perspective

Historical evidence is produced within relations of power; criticism begins with provenance and purpose. Official records are indispensable for the colonial state but cannot alone represent the people governed by it.

Mughal Fragmentation and Regional States

Aurangzeb died in **1707**; Mughal decline accelerated afterward but was neither immediate nor caused by one ruler alone.

Repeated succession struggles made emperors dependent on competing nobles, while factional conflict weakened appointments, revenue collection and military coordination.

Decline was a process, not a date

Aurangzeb's reign left the empire territorially extensive and administratively functional, but several stresses had intensified: prolonged Deccan warfare, competition for jagirs, difficulty controlling powerful zamindars and regional chiefs, and conflict within an enlarged nobility. His death did not cause collapse by itself. It removed a commanding emperor when institutional strains required coordinated reform.

Bahadur Shah I attempted conciliation with Rajputs, Marathas, Bundelas and Sikhs but lacked time, resources and a consistent settlement. After his death in 1712, noble factions ceased merely supporting rival princes and increasingly used emperors as instruments. Zulfiqar Khan dominated Jahandar Shah; the Sayyid brothers, Abdullah Khan and Husain Ali Khan, helped Farrukhsiyar gain the throne, then deposed and killed him in 1719. Muhammad Shah eventually escaped their control, but continuing factionalism prevented sustained reform.

The key distinction is between **dynastic weakness** and **structural weakness**. Weak emperors mattered because appointment, command and arbitration were concentrated at court. Yet even a capable emperor would have faced a fiscal-military system in which offices, land revenue assignments and local power had become increasingly difficult to balance.

Causes: an interacting chain

Political and dynastic instability

There was no fixed law of succession. Each imperial death could produce civil war, casualties among experienced commanders and expensive grants to supporters. Rapid changes at court weakened trust and encouraged provincial officials to secure local bases. The emperor's inability to protect office-holders made office increasingly personal and hereditary.

Noble faction and the mansab-jagir problem

The *mansabdari* system assigned rank and military obligation; many mansabdars received a *jagir*, an assignment of land revenue rather than ownership of the soil. The number and claimed rank of nobles increased faster than the availability of productive assignments. Some jagirs were over-assessed on paper, transferred frequently or contested locally. A jagirdar with insecure tenure had an incentive to maximize short-term collection rather than invest in long-term cultivation.

This “jagirdari crisis” connected court politics to rural pressure:

- insufficient desirable jagirs intensified factional competition;
- revenue claims exceeded realizable income;
- jagirdars pressed zamindars and cultivators;
- zamindars withheld revenue, fortified positions or aligned with regional powers;
- declining remittances weakened central military capacity.

Agrarian and zamindar resistance

Zamindars were not simply tax collectors. Many possessed hereditary claims, armed retainers, caste or clan authority and local legitimacy. Jat, Sikh, Maratha and other mobilizations drew strength from rural society, although their aims and class composition differed. Increased extraction could turn a local intermediary into a rebel; successful rebels could become state-builders.

Deccan wars and military limits

Aurangzeb's long campaigns against the Deccan sultanates and Marathas consumed money, men and attention. Mughal artillery remained formidable, but the state struggled to adapt its military organization, logistics and naval capacity to mobile regional warfare and expanding European fiscal-military power. Technological difference alone did not produce decline: coordination, finance, discipline, credit and command were equally decisive.

External invasions

Nadir Shah exploited a neglected frontier and a divided command. At Karnal in February 1739, factional Mughal leadership failed to coordinate a numerically substantial army. The sack of Delhi removed treasure, the Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor, damaged commerce and transferred territories west of the Indus. The greater loss was political: provincial and foreign powers now saw the imperial centre's vulnerability.

Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded repeatedly between 1748 and 1767. He extracted tribute, intervened in Punjab and Delhi, and defeated the Marathas at the Third Battle of Panipat on 14 January 1761. Abdali did not create a durable Indian empire. His campaigns further fragmented north Indian authority and opened space later used by Sikh, Maratha and Company power.

What survived Mughal decline

Decline of centralized control did not erase the Mughal political world. Successor rulers sought imperial titles and *sanads*; Persian remained an administrative language; revenue offices and territorial units continued; and the emperor retained symbolic value. Marathas used the right to collect *chauth* and *sardesh-mukhi* through negotiations framed within Mughal sovereignty. The Company itself sought *farmans* and later presented its acquisitions as legally authorized rights.

Regional state formation therefore combined three processes:

1. **appropriation:** provincial governors redirected revenue and appointments locally;
2. **adaptation:** rulers combined Mughal institutions with regional military, landed and commercial networks;
3. **innovation:** some states reorganized armies, taxation, credit and court culture for new conditions.

Successor states

Hyderabad

Nizam-ul-Mulk, also known as Chin Qilich Khan and Asaf Jah I, was a leading Mughal noble and briefly *wazir*. Frustrated by court politics, he returned to the Deccan and defeated the imperial nominee Mubariz Khan at Shakar Kheda in 1724. Hyderabad remained nominally within the empire, but appointments, war and revenue became effectively autonomous.

The Nizam balanced Mughal-derived offices with Deccani interests, local zamindars and powerful Hindu financial-administrative groups. The state was not fully centralized: the Carnatic deputy became increasingly autonomous, while Maratha claims and European competition exerted pressure. Hyderabad illustrates **continuity of form with relocation of sovereignty**.

Bengal

Murshid Quli Khan built an autonomous fiscal regime while retaining formal Mughal loyalty. He shifted the administrative centre to Murshidabad, tightened revenue collection, expanded revenue farming and relied on powerful zamindars and bankers. Large landed estates and mercantile houses, especially the Jagat Seth network, acquired major political influence.

After his death in 1727, Shuja-ud-din Khan and Sarfaraz Khan succeeded within the regional dynasty; Alivardi Khan defeated Sarfaraz at Giria in 1740. Bengal's productive agriculture, textiles, river system and overseas trade financed a wealthy court. Maratha incursions in the 1740s caused serious disruption, but commercial prosperity and banking capacity persisted. Bengal shows why a region rich in resources attracted Company intervention rather than awaiting conquest as a passive political vacuum.

Awadh

Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk, appointed governor in 1722, founded an autonomous state while maintaining imperial forms. Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula consolidated it. Awadh drew strength from fertile agriculture, control of the middle Gangetic plain, military recruitment, revenue farmers, bankers and landed magnates known as taluqdars.

The nawabs attempted to control rebellious zamindars but also depended on them. Lucknow and Faizabad became administrative, commercial and cultural centres. Awadh's strategic location between Delhi, Bengal, Rohilkhand and the Maratha sphere made it both powerful and exposed.

States created through resistance and confederation

Maratha power

Maratha expansion cannot be reduced either to Hindu revival or simple plunder. It developed through the legacy of Shivaji's state, rivalry between Shahu and the Kolhapur branch, Peshwa leadership, claims to *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi*, mobile cavalry, revenue collection and negotiation with local elites.

Balaji Vishwanath, Peshwa from 1713, stabilized Shahu's position and secured Mughal recognition of Maratha fiscal claims in the Deccan. Baji Rao I, Peshwa from 1720 to 1740, carried expansion into Malwa, Gujarat and Bundelkhand and demonstrated Mughal weakness near Delhi in 1737. Under Balaji Baji Rao, a confederacy of powerful houses emerged: Scindia in Gwalior, Holkar in Indore, Gaekwad in Baroda and Bhonsle in Nagpur, alongside the Peshwa at Pune.

Confederation enabled rapid expansion but limited central discipline. The defeat at Panipat in 1761 followed overextended supply lines, weak local alliances and Abdali's stronger coalition. Maratha power recovered under Madhav Rao I and Mahadji Scindia; Panipat was a severe check, not final destruction. Rivalry among confederate chiefs later made united resistance to the Company difficult.

Sikh power

Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa in 1699; after his death in 1708, Banda Bahadur led a militant and agrarian challenge in Punjab. His forces attacked Mughal officials and large landlords and briefly redistributed land in some areas before his capture and execution in 1716.

Under continuing persecution and Afghan invasion, Sikh warrior bands organized into *misls*. The Dal Khalsa, formed in 1748, coordinated the confederacies without eliminating their autonomy. Ranjit Singh of the Sukerchakia *misl* captured Lahore in

1799 and became Maharaja in 1801. Sikh state formation thus moved from religious-military resistance to confederation and then monarchical consolidation.

Jat state

Jat uprisings around Mathura and Agra began before Aurangzeb's death. Churaman and Badan Singh consolidated a kingdom centred on Bharatpur; Suraj Mal expanded it across parts of the Delhi-Agra region and built an effective revenue and military system. Jat power declined after his death in 1763, but it had already demonstrated how agriculturist-zamindar mobilization could produce a regional state.

Independent and reconstituted regional kingdoms

Mysore

Mysore's Wodeyar monarchy survived while military commanders accumulated power. Haidar Ali became the effective ruler in 1761 and created a disciplined army, used European techniques selectively, strengthened arsenals and sought tighter revenue control. Tipu Sultan succeeded him in 1782 and pursued further military, commercial and administrative innovation. Mysore was less dependent on Mughal legitimacy than the successor states and more willing to centralize against local chiefs.

Travancore and Kerala

Martanda Varma, ruler of Travancore from 1729 to 1758, conquered neighbouring territories, reduced the power of local nobles, reorganized the army and defeated the Dutch East India Company at Colachel in 1741. The state supported commerce and used coastal connections while maintaining a distinctive court and temple-centred political order. Cochin, Calicut and

other Kerala polities followed different trajectories; “Kerala” was not one unified state.

Rajputs, Rohillas and Bangash Pathans

Rajput rulers negotiated autonomy within Mughal sovereignty.

Sawai Jai Singh II of Amber founded Jaipur, patronized astronomy and served as an imperial governor while building a regional court. Clan rivalry and competition among Rajput houses prevented a unified Rajput state.

Afghan migration and Mughal weakening aided Ali Muhammad Khan’s Rohilkhand in the Himalayan foothills and Muhammad Khan Bangash’s principality around Farrukhabad. Their location exposed them to Awadh, Maratha and later Company pressure.

Economy: disruption and resilience

Agriculture generated most state income. Cultivators faced claims from the state, jagirdars, zamindars and revenue farmers, with severity varying by crop, region and political stability. Warfare damaged cultivation where armies requisitioned grain, destroyed irrigation or displaced people. Yet land was not uniformly scarce, and productive zones continued to support large cities and export industries.

India remained a major manufacturer and trading region.

Cotton textiles, silk, saltpetre, indigo, sugar, rice, metalware and opium moved through internal and overseas markets. Textile centres included Dhaka (Dacca), Murshidabad, Patna, Varanasi, Lucknow, Surat, Ahmedabad, Burhanpur, Lahore, Masulipatnam and Madurai. Shipbuilding flourished in Bengal, western India and the Andhra coast. A favourable trade balance brought silver into the subcontinent.

Political fragmentation affected commerce unevenly:

- warfare and additional customs posts obstructed some long-distance routes;

- the decline of Delhi and Agra harmed luxury crafts tied to the imperial court;
- new courts at Lucknow, Faizabad, Murshidabad, Hyderabad, Pune, Patna and Jaipur created demand;
- European sea trade expanded even when overland routes through Afghanistan and Iran became insecure;
- merchants and bankers used *hundis*, kinship networks and “portfolio” investments across revenue, trade and credit.

Economic power and political power converged. The Jagat Seths in Bengal, for example, could finance rulers and influence succession. Revenue farmers combined fiscal knowledge, cash and armed support. This commercial vitality complicates a general-collapse thesis, but it does not prove modern industrial transformation. Productivity, scientific institutions and state support for technological change remained uneven.

Society, education and culture

Social hierarchy was structured through caste, status, occupation, gender, household and region. Hindu society contained thousands of *jatis* rather than four functioning varnas alone. Caste councils enforced marriage, dining and occupational norms, yet wealth, office, migration and military service sometimes enabled mobility. Muslim society also contained distinctions among *ashraf* elites and lower-status groups, as well as Irani, Turani, Afghan, Hindustani, Shia and Sunni affiliations. Political alliances did not consistently follow religious identity.

Patriarchy limited women’s property, education, movement and marital choice, especially among many elite groups. Purdah was regionally and socially uneven; peasant and artisan women worked outside the household. Child marriage, restrictions on widow remarriage, dowry and widow immolation existed in particular communities and regions, not as uniform “Indian” customs. Nair and some other Kerala groups followed matrilineal inheritance. Women such as Ahilyabai Holkar also exercised

sovereign authority, but exceptional rulers did not remove structural inequality.

Elementary teaching occurred in *pathshalas* and *maktabas*; Sanskrit *to/s* and Persian-Arabic madrasas supported advanced learning. Access varied by caste, class, gender and locality, with girls especially disadvantaged. The curriculum emphasized language, literature, law, religion, philosophy, logic and practical arithmetic more than experimental science. It should not be described as absent, but its institutions did not match the accelerating scientific and industrial transformation of western Europe.

As imperial patronage weakened, artists and intellectuals moved to regional courts. Mughal painters found support in Lucknow, Hyderabad, Murshidabad, Patna and other centres; Rajput and Kangra painting flourished; Jaipur developed architecture and astronomical observatories; Urdu poetry expanded through Mir, Sauda and Nazir; Punjabi, Sindhi, Malayalam, Tamil, Assamese and other literary cultures grew. Composite practices remained strong: political alliances crossed religion, shared shrines attracted multiple communities, and Persian and regional languages circulated across confessional lines.

Consequences of the transition

The eighteenth-century transition produced four long-term outcomes:

1. **Sovereignty became layered.** The Mughal emperor retained symbolic authority while effective power moved to provinces, confederacies and local magnates.
2. **Regional economies became political bases.** Revenue, banking and merchant credit sustained new states and attracted European companies.
3. **Military competition intensified.** Mobile armies, fortified centres, artillery and European-trained infantry raised fiscal demands.

4. **No single Indian power replaced the empire.** Regional rivalries and uneven centralization created opportunities for the English Company, but Company conquest still required diplomacy, Indian finance, allied armies and repeated wars.

Interpretations and debates

Personality failure or structural crisis?

J. N. Sarkar emphasized weak emperors and incompetent commanders after Aurangzeb. This explains why coordination worsened but cannot explain why able nobles were unable to restore the system. Satish Chandra and Irfan Habib foreground jagirdari and agrarian crisis: competition for assignments, excessive revenue demand and zamindar resistance eroded the fiscal base. M. Athar Ali's work on the nobility reinforces the structural importance of faction and intermediary power. A balanced answer treats individual weakness as an accelerator operating within institutional and fiscal strain.

Decline or regional transformation?

Older imperial-centred narratives saw fragmentation, disorder and economic decay. Revisionist historians such as C. A. Bayly, Muzaffar Alam, Andre Wink and Rajat Kanta Ray shift attention to provincial commercialization, merchant-bankers, zamindars and new regional elites. Alam describes "upstarts" who captured resources previously monopolized by hereditary nobility; Bayly emphasizes commercial and "portfolio" capital; Wink interprets Mughal sovereignty as a flexible balance that had long accommodated *fitna*, negotiation and multiple rights.

This revision does not prove that central collapse was harmless. Nadir Shah's sack, warfare, agrarian extraction and unsafe routes caused real damage. It does show that power and wealth were redistributed rather than simply disappearing. The most defensible formulation is **imperial decline alongside uneven regional growth and institutional continuity**.

Was the eighteenth-century economy stagnant?

Bipan Chandra emphasizes technological backwardness, agrarian extraction and an absence of structural transformation, while acknowledging manufacturing, trade and resilience. Regional studies demonstrate expanding sea trade, banking networks, new urban centres and artisanal vitality. The disagreement partly reflects scale: a growing textile district or merchant network can coexist with low average productivity and peasant insecurity. Avoid both claims that the entire economy collapsed and that commercial growth amounted to industrialization.

Did religion drive political conflict?

Religious identities mattered, but alliances regularly crossed them. Rajputs, Marathas, Mughal factions, Sikhs, Jats and Afghan chiefs pursued sovereignty, revenue, office and local rights as well as religious aims. Aurangzeb's policies affected trust, yet a communal two-bloc explanation cannot account for shifting coalitions, Hindu officials in Muslim-ruled states, Muslim officers under non-Muslim rulers, or shared cultural institutions. Religious idiom must be connected to political economy and regional context.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1707	Death of Aurangzeb; Bahadur Shah I succeeded after a war	Opened a period in which succession conflict and noble competition increasingly shaped imperial politics.
1708-16	Banda Bahadur led a major Sikh challenge; he was executed in 1716	Combined religious leadership, agrarian grievances and a challenge to Mughal authority in Punjab.
1712-20	Rapid succession, Farrukhsiyar's deposition and the Sayyid brothers' dominance	Emperors became dependent on "king-maker" nobles; court factionalism disrupted administration.
1713	Balaji Vishwanath became Peshwa	Began the rise of Peshwa leadership and the expansion of Maratha influence beyond Maharashtra.
1717	Farrukhsiyar issued an important trading <i>farman</i> to the English Company; Murshid Quli Khan became governor of Bengal	Shows simultaneous imperial concession and provincial consolidation.
1720-40	Baji Rao I served as Peshwa	Maratha power expanded into Malwa, Gujarat and Bundelkhand.
1722	Saadat Khan was appointed governor of Awadh	Beginning of an effectively hereditary successor state centred on Lucknow and Faizabad.
1724	Nizam-ul-Mulk defeated Mubariz Khan at Shakar Kheda	Effective establishment of autonomous Hyderabad under the Asaf Jahi dynasty.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1727	Sawai Jai Singh II founded Jaipur; Murshid Quli Khan died	Regional courts became new political and cultural centres.
1731	Treaty of Warna	Settled the Shahu-Kolhapur dispute and recognized a territorial division within Maratha politics.
1737	Baji Rao I's force reached the vicinity of Delhi	Demonstrated the changed balance between the Mughal centre and Maratha power.
1739	Nadir Shah defeated the Mughals at Karnal and sacked Delhi	Destroyed prestige, depleted resources and exposed the north-west frontier.
1740	Alivardi Khan defeated Sarfaraz Khan at Giria and took Bengal	Provincial succession was decided within the regional political arena.
1741	Travancore defeated the Dutch at Colachel	A regional Indian state checked a European company militarily.
1748	Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions began; Dal Khalsa was organized at Amritsar	Afghan pressure and Sikh confederation reshaped Punjab politics.
1761	Third Battle of Panipat; Haidar Ali became the effective ruler of Mysore	Panipat checked Maratha northward expansion; Mysore emerged as a major military-fiscal state.
1763	Death of Suraj Mal	Marked the end of the strongest phase of the Jat kingdom of Bharatpur.
1767	Last invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali	Closed a major cycle of Afghan intervention without restoring Mughal power.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1799-1801	Ranjit Singh captured Lahore and assumed the title Maharaja	The Sikh misls were consolidated into a powerful Punjab kingdom.

High-confusion comparisons

Types of regional state

Type	Defining route to power	Main examples	Mughal relationship
Successor state	Provincial governor made authority autonomous and hereditary	Hyderabad, Bengal, Awadh	Retained titles, offices and nominal allegiance
Resistance/confederal state	Warrior, agrarian or religious mobilization expanded territorially	Marathas, Sikhs, Jats	Challenged authority but often sought imperial recognition or used Mughal forms
Independent/reconstituted kingdom	Old strategic polity centralized under new military leadership	Mysore, Travancore, Rajput states	Less dependent on provincial succession; relationship varied

Frequently confused fiscal-political terms

Term	Meaning	Do not confuse with
<i>Mansab</i>	Personal rank carrying status and military obligation	A landed estate
<i>Jagir</i>	Assignment of revenue from specified land	Full private ownership of that land

Term	Meaning	Do not confuse with
<i>Khalisa</i>	Land whose revenue went directly to the imperial treasury	Khalsa, the Sikh collective founded in 1699
Zamindar	Hereditary/local claimant and revenue intermediary, often with armed authority	A uniform class of modern private land-lords
<i>Chauth</i>	Maratha claim generally amounting to one-fourth of assessed revenue	<i>Sardeshmukhi</i> , an additional ten per cent claim
<i>Farman</i>	Imperial order or grant	A bilateral treaty between equal sovereign states
<i>Misl</i>	Sikh warrior confederacy	Dal Khalsa, the coordinating collective of misls

Self-test

1. Why is 1707 a turning point but not a complete explanation of Mughal decline?
2. How did succession wars strengthen noble factions?
3. Explain the jagirdari crisis as a causal chain from court to countryside.
4. Distinguish a successor state from a resistance/confederate state, with two examples of each.
5. Why was Nadir Shah's invasion of 1739 more than a raid for treasure?
6. What did the Third Battle of Panipat change, and what did it not change?
7. How did Bengal's bankers and zamindars contribute to regional autonomy?
8. Compare the political structures of Hyderabad and Mysore.
9. What sequence connected Sikh resistance under Banda Bahadur to Ranjit Singh's kingdom?
10. Give two examples each of economic disruption and eco-

conomic resilience in the eighteenth century.

11. Why is a communal two-bloc explanation inadequate for eighteenth-century politics?
12. Compare the imperial-decline and regional-revisionist interpretations.

Answer key

1. Aurangzeb's death triggered succession conflict and removed strong coordination, but fiscal, jagirdari, agrarian, military and regional strains had developed earlier.
2. Nobles furnished armies and money to rival princes, then used dependent emperors to control appointments, revenue and policy, as the Sayyid brothers did.
3. Too many mansabdars competed for limited or over-assessed jagirs; insecure jagirdars intensified collection, zamindars and peasants resisted, remittances fell, and central military power weakened.
4. Successor states grew from autonomous Mughal provinces, such as Hyderabad and Bengal; resistance/confederate states grew through mobilization and territorial expansion, such as the Marathas and Sikhs.
5. It destroyed imperial prestige, exposed command failure, depleted finances, damaged Delhi and removed the north-western defensive belt west of the Indus.
6. It checked Maratha expansion in north India and inflicted heavy losses, but Maratha power recovered and remained a major force.
7. Zamindars delivered revenue and local force, while bankers provided credit and transfers; together they reduced dependence on Delhi and influenced succession.
8. Hyderabad preserved Mughal provincial forms and nominal allegiance; Mysore centralized under military leaders with weaker dependence on Mughal legitimacy and stronger direct innovation.
9. Banda's agrarian-military challenge was suppressed; Sikh bands reorganized into misls; the Dal Khalsa coordinated

them; Ranjit Singh later consolidated key misls around Lahore.

10. Disruption included sacked cities and unsafe/custom-burdened routes; resilience included expanding sea trade, textile production, banking networks and new regional capitals.
11. Alliances crossed religious identities, internal divisions fractured every community, and struggles involved revenue, office, land and regional sovereignty as well as religious language.
12. Imperial-decline history emphasizes court failure, fiscal crisis and disorder; revisionists emphasize decentralization, commercial elites and regional growth. A balanced view combines central decline with uneven regional transformation.

Closing perspective

Mughal decline was gradual, multi-causal and accelerated after 1707; it was not an instantaneous collapse. Weak rulers mattered because institutions required imperial coordination, but dynastic failure operated within fiscal and military strain.

Rival European Companies

Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in 1498, opening a direct Cape route between western Europe and India; he did not “discover” India or Indian Ocean trade.

The Portuguese *Estado da Índia* joined fortified ports, naval patrols, and the *cartaz* pass system to control maritime commerce.

Armed commerce entered an established trading world

India was connected to the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, East Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Mediterranean long before Portuguese arrival. Arab, Persian, Gujarati, Tamil, Malay, Armenian, and other merchants moved textiles, spices, horses, metals, precious goods, and foodgrains through overlapping networks. European companies did not create this commerce. They entered it with state charters, ocean-going armed ships, and a mercantilist determination to secure monopolies.

The Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453 did not close all older routes, but it strengthened western European incentives to bypass Mediterranean intermediaries. Portuguese navigators combined Atlantic experience, royal finance, cartography, and naval artillery. The Cape route lowered dependence on Venetian and West Asian intermediaries and enabled Portugal to attack shipping far from Europe.

The early companies depended on Indian production and collaboration. They required merchants to assemble goods, brokers to negotiate, bankers to advance credit, rulers to grant land, artisans to manufacture textiles, and soldiers to defend settlements. Their coercive capacity was real but geographically uneven: strong at sea and around fortified ports, weak against major inland states until the eighteenth century.

Portuguese: forts, fleets, and the cartaz

Portuguese power took the form of the *Estado da Índia*, a crown-directed network rather than a compact territorial empire. Francisco de Almeida emphasized command of the sea. Afonso de Albuquerque added strategic bases: Goa in 1510, Malacca in 1511, and Hormuz in 1515. These positions linked the western Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia and supported attempts to monopolize high-value trade.

The *cartaz* was a naval pass imposed on Asian shipping. Ships without it risked seizure. Fortified factories, convoy protection, customs duties, and violent punishment turned commerce into a system of maritime coercion. Goa became the capital, while Diu and Daman guarded the Gujarat coast. Cochin was an early Malabar base.

Portuguese influence included new maritime connections, missionary institutions, and printing at Goa in 1556. Religious intolerance, including the Goa Inquisition, damaged relations. Aggressive proselytization was not the sole reason for decline, but it compounded political and commercial hostility.

Decline had several causes:

- Portugal possessed limited manpower and fiscal capacity for a vast oceanic network.
- Crown officials often mixed public authority with private profit.
- The union of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns from 1580 exposed Portuguese possessions to Spain's enemies.

- Dutch and English companies mobilized larger pools of capital and better long-distance shipping.
- Mughal and regional rulers resisted Portuguese coercion; Shah Jahan's forces expelled them from Hooghly in 1632.
- The Dutch displaced Portugal from important Southeast Asian and Sri Lankan positions.

Portugal nevertheless retained Goa, Daman, and Diu long after losing commercial primacy. Its decline was relative, not instantaneous.

Dutch: commercial strength without an Indian territorial project

The Dutch VOC received extensive sovereign powers in 1602. It could fortify settlements, maintain forces, make treaties, and administer territories. Its Indian establishments included Masulipatnam, Pulicat, Nagapattinam, Cochin, Surat, Chinsurah, Kasimbazar, Patna, and Balasore. Indian cotton textiles were essential because they could be exchanged for spices in Southeast Asia.

The VOC's main strategic objective remained the Indonesian spice monopoly. India provided textiles and other commodities, but it was not the centre of Dutch territorial ambition. Anglo-Dutch rivalry therefore operated within a wider Asian contest. The Amboyna episode of 1623 contributed to English withdrawal from the Moluccas and stronger concentration on India.

Two defeats capture the limit of Dutch power in India. Travancore under Marthanda Varma defeated the Dutch at Colachel in 1741, showing that a regional Indian state could overcome a European company on land. In Bengal, an English force defeated a Dutch expedition near Biderra in 1759. Dutch trade continued, but the VOC no longer posed a major political challenge to the English in India.

English: from petitioners to presidency power

The English Company's charter created a joint-stock corporation under royal protection. Its early progress depended on negotiated permission:

- Captain William Hawkins reached Jahangir's court after arriving at Surat in 1608, but secured no stable monopoly.
- English success against a Portuguese fleet near Suvali in 1612 improved its standing.
- Sir Thomas Roe's embassy from 1615 to 1618 secured protection and trading concessions without granting the Company political independence.
- Masulipatnam became an early Coromandel factory; Chennai followed in 1639, with Fort St George as its fortified centre.
- Mumbai, transferred to the Company in 1668, offered a natural harbour and replaced Surat as the western headquarters.
- In Bengal, the Company traded at Hooghly, Kasimbazar, Patna, Balasore, and Dhaka before consolidating the three villages around Kolkata and Fort William.

The word "factory" meant a trading station headed by factors, not a manufacturing plant. These stations contained warehouses, residences, offices, and sometimes fortifications.

The Company repeatedly attempted to expand privilege into jurisdiction. Child's War exposed the limit. English attacks on Mughal shipping and ports in 1686 brought imperial retaliation; factories were seized and Mumbai was blockaded. The Company apologized and paid compensation. Aurangzeb restored trade because overseas commerce produced customs revenue and because English sea power could disrupt shipping. The settlement proved that European ascent was not linear.

Farrukhsiyar's 1717 *farman* became a later point of conflict. It expanded commercial privileges, but Company servants treated corporate concessions as permission for duty-free private trade and transferred *dastaks* to Indian associates. What looked like a customs dispute was also a struggle over sovereignty: who could

tax trade within an Indian province?

French: rapid political ascent and strategic overreach

The French East India Company was founded under Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1664. Surat and Masulipatnam were early factories; Chandernagore became the Bengal centre; Pondicherry became the principal headquarters. Mahé, Yanam, and Karaikal extended its coastal network. French activity benefited from Mauritius and Réunion in the Indian Ocean.

Joseph François Dupleix recognized that a small, drilled force could decide succession disputes and obtain territory, revenue, and clients. This was not uniquely French. It became the common method of both French and English companies: support a claimant, deploy European-trained troops and sepoys, demand concessions, and station forces that made the victorious claimant dependent.

First Carnatic War: naval war and the Adyar lesson

The War of the Austrian Succession brought Britain and France into conflict. A French fleet under La Bourdonnais captured Madras in 1746. Dupleix tried to retain it, despite an earlier understanding that it would be restored for ransom. Nawab Anwaruddin of the Carnatic demanded its return.

A small French force defeated the Nawab's much larger army at St Thomé near the Adyar River. The importance was organizational, not racial: concentrated artillery, disciplined volleys, drill, and unitary command could defeat a larger force assembled under a different military system. Indian states rapidly learned this lesson and developed drilled infantry of their own.

The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 restored Madras to the English in exchange for territorial adjustments elsewhere. No Indian settlement resolved the underlying rivalry.

Second Carnatic War: succession politics became company politics

The death of Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah in 1748 triggered a Hyderabad succession struggle. Muzaffar Jang opposed Nasir Jang. In the Carnatic, Chanda Sahib challenged Anwaruddin and later Muhammad Ali. Dupleix supported Muzaffar Jang and Chanda Sahib; the English backed their rivals.

The French alliance won at Ambur in 1749, where Anwaruddin was killed. French influence rose dramatically. Bussy maintained a force at Hyderabad and obtained the Northern Circars for its support. Yet French expansion required continuous military expenditure, and clients could change allegiance.

The English recovery centred on Arcot. In 1751 Robert Clive seized the Carnatic capital with a small force, compelling Chanda Sahib to divert troops from Trichinopoly. The defence of Arcot enhanced English prestige; support from Maratha, Mysore, and Tanjore forces also mattered. Chanda Sahib was captured and killed in 1752. French directors, alarmed by expense and global risk, recalled Dupleix in 1754. The settlement at Pondicherry temporarily limited intervention.

Third Carnatic War: global war decided the regional contest

The Seven Years' War made the third conflict part of a global struggle. Count de Lally captured Fort St David in 1758 but faced weak naval support, strained finances, conflict with French officials, and difficulty coordinating with Bussy. The English could draw on the Royal Navy, three presidency bases, and Bengal's financial capacity after Plassey.

At Wandiwash in January 1760, Eyre Coote defeated Lally and captured Bussy. Pondicherry surrendered in January 1761. The Treaty of Paris restored French factories in 1763, but they could not sustain a fortified territorial challenge. French people and settlements remained in India; French political-military supremacy did not.

Why English predominance emerged

The result came from interacting advantages rather than national character:

1. **Maritime logistics:** the Royal Navy could isolate French settlements and protect reinforcement routes.
2. **Financial capacity:** the English state's funded debt and the Company's credit networks sustained long wars.
3. **Three presidency bases:** Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata provided geographic redundancy; loss in one theatre did not destroy the system.
4. **Commercial continuity:** English officials did not abandon revenue-producing commerce while pursuing political influence.
5. **Bengal after 1757:** access to Bengal's payments, credit, and revenues strengthened the English in the final Anglo-French contest.
6. **Company-state partnership:** the English corporation was private, but royal charters, naval force, legislation, and metropolitan finance supported it.
7. **Sepoy forces:** locally recruited and European-drilled soldiers made sustained expansion possible at lower cost.
8. **Indian alliances:** bankers, merchants, rulers, commanders, and claimants provided money, intelligence, troops, and legitimacy.
9. **French constraints:** dependence on an unstable state-backed structure, recall of Dupleix, naval weakness, and Lally's conflicts reduced strategic continuity.

10. **Contingency:** English forces suffered serious failures; a different combination of European war, Indian alliances, and finance could have produced another outcome.

Industrialization strengthened Britain later, but it should not be projected backward as the master explanation for seventeenth-century trade or the first two Carnatic Wars. Likewise, “less religious zeal” does not explain English victory: the Company could be coercive, and later British rule supported missionary access and cultural intervention.

Interpretations and debates

P.J. Marshall emphasizes that early territorial expansion was not directed by one consistent plan in London; officials in Asia exploited regional opportunities. This explains improvisation, but not the absence of aggressive commercial aims.

Philip Lawson stresses the close relationship between company and state, describing expansion as state imperialism by proxy. Royal charters, naval force, metropolitan credit, and political protection made the idea of a purely private conquest misleading.

C.A. Bayly highlights fiscal-military needs and Indian commercial networks. English power grew through access to revenue, credit, information, and collaboration, not simply through superior weapons.

Gallagher and Robinson’s formula, “trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule when necessary,” clarifies the movement from concessions to political interference. Yet informal control often generated the crises used to justify deeper rule.

The balanced judgement is that English predominance was contingent but structured. It depended on Indian political competition and collaboration, while the Company-state’s finance, navy, organizational continuity, and presidency network allowed it to exploit those openings more successfully than its European rivals.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1498	Vasco da Gama reaches Calicut	Establishes a direct Cape route from Europe into the Indian Ocean trading system.
1505	Francisco de Almeida becomes the first Portuguese viceroy in India	Gives priority to naval command, often called the “blue-water” strategy.
1509	Portuguese victory at Diu	Secures a major period of Portuguese naval predominance in the western Indian Ocean.
1510	Afonso de Albuquerque captures Goa	Creates the chief Portuguese political and administrative centre in India.
1600	English East India Company chartered	Establishes an English joint-stock monopoly for trade east of the Cape of Good Hope.
1602	Dutch VOC chartered	Creates a well-capitalized company with powers to make war, conclude treaties, and hold territory.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1612–13	English victory off Suvali and establishment at Surat	Improves the English position against Portugal and secures a durable Mughal-port foothold.
1615–18	Sir Thomas Roe at Jahangir's court	Obtains imperial protection for English trade, though not unrestricted sovereignty.
1639–40	Chennai acquired; Fort St George developed	Anchors English activity on the Coromandel Coast.
1661–68	Mumbai passes from Portugal to the English Crown and then to the Company	Gives the Company a defensible harbour and future western presidency base.
1664	French East India Company founded	Introduces the last major European corporate rival in India.
1674	Pondicherry established under François Martin	Becomes the central French settlement in India.
1686–90	Child's War against the Mughal Empire	Demonstrates that English naval strength could not yet overcome Mughal land power.
1698	Company secures zamindari rights over Sutanuti, Kalikata, and Govindpur	Consolidates the settlement that developed into Kolkata and Fort William.
1717	Farrukhsiyar's <i>farman</i>	Confirms and expands English commercial privileges, later disputed over private trade and customs.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1746–48	First Carnatic War	Carries the War of the Austrian Succession into India; Madras is captured and re-stored.
1749–54	Second Carnatic War	European companies intervene in Hyderabad and Carnatic succession struggles.
1751	Clive captures and defends Arcot	Weakens Chanda Sahib's position and shifts momentum toward the English.
1756–63	Third Carnatic War	Indian theatre of the Seven Years' War; English maritime and financial advantages become decisive.
22 Jan 1760	Battle of Wandiwash	Eyre Coote defeats Lally; Bussy is captured and French field power collapses.
1761	Pondicherry surrenders	Ends the French capacity to wage a major territorial war in India.
1763	Treaty of Paris	Restores French factories under restrictions while confirming English European predominance in India.

High-confusion comparisons

Power	Corporate form	Main Indian bases	Primary strength	Major limitation	Political result by 1763
Portuguese	Crown-directed Estado	Goa, Diu, Daman, Cochin	Early naval artillery and fortified choke points	Small demographic-fiscal base; Dutch-English competition	Retained enclaves but lost commercial primacy.
Dutch	Chartered VOC	Pulicat, Nagapattinam, Cochin, Chinsurah	Capital, shipping, intra-Asian trade	Strategic focus on Indonesia	Continued commerce; no major Indian territorial bid.
English	Joint-stock company with state support	Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata	Navy, credit, three bases, sepoys, Indian alliances	Initially weak on land; dependent on negotiated privileges	Became the leading European political-military power.
French	State-supported company	Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Mahé, Karaikal	Dupleix's diplomacy and trained forces	Naval weakness, finance, recall and command conflict	Factories restored, territorial challenge broken.

Carnatic War	Wider trigger	Indian political setting	Turning point	Settlement
First, 1746–48	War of Austrian Succession	Nawab challenges French seizure of Madras	French victory at Adyar demonstrates disciplined infantry	Aix-la-Chapelle restores Madras.
Second, 1749–54	Regional succession disputes	Hyderabad and Carnatic rival claimants	Arcot and relief of Trichinopoly reverse French gains	Dupleix recalled; temporary Pondicherry agreement.
Third, 1756–63	Seven Years' War	Global Anglo-French contest	Wandiwash and fall of Pondicherry	Paris restores factories under English predominance.

Self-test

1. What changed in 1498, and what did not?
2. How did the Portuguese *cartaz* system operate?
3. Why did the Dutch fail to build a large territorial empire in India despite commercial strength?
4. What did Child's War reveal about the English position in the late seventeenth century?
5. Why were Chennai, Mumbai, and Kolkata collectively important?
6. What was the military lesson of the Battle of Adyar?
7. Which succession disputes drove the Second Carnatic War?
8. Why was the capture of Arcot strategically important?
9. What made Wandiwash decisive?
10. Distinguish the roles of Wandiwash and Plassey in English ascendancy.
11. Give four structural reasons for English success over the French.
12. How do Marshall and Lawson differ on the relationship between metropolitan policy and company expansion?

Answer key

1. A direct Cape sea route from western Europe reached Calicut; India and its maritime trading system already existed and were not "discovered."
2. Portuguese naval patrols required Asian ships to carry paid passes and threatened seizure of vessels sailing without authorization.
3. The VOC prioritized the Indonesian spice trade; Indian factories mainly provided textiles and other goods for intra-Asian exchange.
4. Mughal forces could punish Company aggression on land, compelling the English to apologize, pay compensation, and resume trade under imperial authority.
5. The three presidency bases created secure harbours, revenue centres, recruitment zones, and geographic redundancy

across western, southern, and eastern India.

6. A small drilled infantry-artillery force under unitary command could defeat a much larger army organized for another style of warfare.
7. Muzaffar Jang versus Nasir Jang in Hyderabad, and Chanda Sahib versus Anwaruddin and Muhammad Ali in the Carnatic.
8. It forced Chanda Sahib to divert forces from Trichinopoly, sustained Muhammad Ali, increased English prestige, and attracted allies.
9. Eyre Coote defeated Lally and captured Bussy, breaking the French field army before Pondicherry's fall.
10. Wandiwash removed the principal European military rival; Plassey gave the English access to Bengal's wealth and political leverage.
11. Naval superiority, metropolitan credit, three presidency bases, commercial revenue, Bengal's wealth, sepoy forces, Indian alliances, and French strategic discontinuity are valid factors.
12. Marshall stresses improvisation by officials in Asia and the absence of a consistent early London plan; Lawson emphasizes the Crown-company partnership and state-backed imperial aggression.

Closing perspective

European expansion was an insertion into a dense Indian Ocean economy, not the beginning of Indian overseas trade. Portuguese power was strongest at sea and at strategic ports; it never meant uniform control of the Indian interior.

From Plassey to the Diwani

Early eighteenth-century Bengal was wealthy, commercially connected, and increasingly autonomous under Murshid Quli Khan and his successors.

Farrukhsiyar's 1717 *farman* granted important Company privileges, but it did not authorize unlimited duty-free private trade by Company servants.

Why Bengal attracted the Company

Bengal included most of present-day West Bengal and Bangladesh, with Bihar and Orissa under the nawab's authority. It exported cotton and silk textiles, silk, saltpetre, sugar, rice, indigo, and other commodities. Indian, Armenian, and European merchants operated through networks of brokers, artisans, bankers, and river ports. Bengal goods formed a large share of English imports from Asia.

Political autonomy did not mean economic collapse. Murshid Quli Khan shifted the administrative centre to Murshidabad, disciplined revenue collection, and cultivated powerful zamindars and financiers. The Jagat Seth banking house acquired exceptional influence through revenue remittance, minting, and credit. Shuja-ud-Din, Sarfaraz Khan, and Alivardi Khan inherited an increasingly autonomous provincial order that retained the symbolic legitimacy of the Mughal emperor.

Alivardi Khan faced Maratha incursions and Afghan rebellion but kept European companies subordinate. Their trade brought bullion and customs income; their armed rivalry threatened provincial authority. Bengal's prosperity therefore created both attraction and capacity: it drew European commercial competition and later financed the Company's military expansion.

The 1717 privilege problem

Farrukhsiyar's *farman* confirmed valuable concessions, including favorable customs treatment for Company trade. The crucial distinction was between the Company's export-import commerce and the private inland trade of its servants. Company officials used *dastaks*, or passes, to shield private goods from duties and sometimes sold protection to Indian merchants.

The consequences were political as well as fiscal:

- the nawab lost internal customs revenue;
- Indian traders faced competitors claiming tax immunity;
- Company servants could use corporate military power to defend private profit;
- provincial officers who enforced customs risked confrontation with armed foreigners;
- a commercial concession was stretched into a claim to jurisdiction.

Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan tried to contain these abuses. Under Siraj-ud-Daulah the conflict became acute because English confidence had risen after victories in the Carnatic.

Siraj-ud-Daulah and the sovereignty crisis of 1756

Siraj inherited a divided court. Ghaseti Begum controlled wealth and patronage; Shaukat Jang claimed the succession;

Mir Jafar had military standing; Rai Durlabh, Jagat Seth, Omic-hand, and other elite figures pursued their own interests. Court factionalism made resistance to an external corporate power harder, but it did not make Siraj's authority illegitimate.

Four immediate disputes drove the confrontation:

1. **Customs abuse:** Company servants expanded duty-free claims and private trade.
2. **Fortification:** the English strengthened Fort William without permission while anticipating renewed war with France.
3. **Asylum:** the settlement sheltered Krishna Das, son of Raj Bal-labh, who was wanted by the nawab's government.
4. **Independent warfare:** European companies expected to fight one another inside Bengal despite the nawab's prohibition.

Siraj seized the Kasimbazar factory and then Kolkata. Fort William fell on 20 June 1756, while many English officials escaped to Fulda under naval protection.

The "Black Hole of Calcutta" narrative came largely through John Zephaniah Holwell, who claimed that 146 prisoners were confined overnight and only 23 survived. The physical capacity of the room, the numbers, contemporary silence, and the question of deliberate intent have all been challenged. A confinement incident may have occurred, but the later imperial story greatly magnified it and used it to moralize conquest. Exam answers should identify the controversy rather than repeat the traditional numbers as settled fact.

From Alinagar to conspiracy

Forces under Robert Clive and Admiral Charles Watson arrived from Chennai (Madras), recaptured Kolkata, and compelled Siraj to sign the Treaty of Alinagar in February 1757. It restored English privileges and allowed fortification. In March, the English attacked Chandernagore, weakening the French position despite the nawab's concern.

Clive then joined a conspiracy to replace Siraj with Mir Jafar. The coalition included Company officials and disaffected members of Bengal's military, court, banking, and mercantile elite. The Jagat Seth bankers were essential because regime change required credit and political coordination. Rai Durlabh and Mir Jafar controlled important forces. Omichand attempted to secure a large personal reward; Clive's group deceived him through different versions of the agreement.

The exact origin of the conspiracy is less important than the collusion that made the result possible. Company intervention did not simply exploit a ready-made Indian plot, and Indian collaborators were not passive instruments. Their goals differed: some sought protection of wealth, some office, some trade, and some revenge. The Company alone possessed an organized corporate-military structure able to convert the coup into durable external control.

Plassey: limited battle, profound political turn

Clive's force met Siraj's much larger army at Palashi (Plassey), about 30 kilometres from Murshidabad, on 23 June 1757. Mir Jafar and Rai Durlabh withheld their main contingents. Mir Madan fought and was killed; Mohan Lal continued resistance but could not reverse the collapse. Rain affected the battlefield, but conspiracy and command paralysis were decisive. Siraj fled, was captured, and was killed on the orders of Miran, Mir Jafar's son.

Plassey mattered because it changed control over appointments, payments, and military access, not because it displayed overwhelming English battlefield superiority. Its immediate effects included:

- Mir Jafar became nawab under Company protection.
- The Company received the zamindari of the Twenty-Four Parganas.
- The Company, its army and navy, Kolkata claimants, and indi-

vidual officials received enormous payments and presents.

- Company servants expanded private trade and political intervention.
- Bengal money helped finance the struggle against the French and wider military commitments.
- Corporate trade increasingly relied on local revenue and political exactions instead of imported bullion.

The phrase “Plassey plunder” captures the extraordinary transfer of wealth after the coup. It should not imply that Bengal’s entire economy collapsed overnight. Political extraction, trade coercion, and institutional weakening unfolded over subsequent years.

Mir Jafar's failure was built into the settlement

Mir Jafar had to reward those who installed him, maintain the court and army, and satisfy repeated Company demands. These commitments exceeded ordinary fiscal capacity. Company servants treated regime change as a route to gifts and private fortunes; the corporation expected Bengal to help fund its other presidencies and purchase exports.

When Mir Jafar could not meet escalating demands, Company leaders interpreted dependence they had created as administrative incapacity. His effort to seek Dutch support ended when English forces defeated the Dutch near Biderra in 1759. In 1760 Governor Henry Vansittart supported Mir Qasim, Mir Jafar’s son-in-law, in return for Burdwan, Midnapore, and Chittagong and other commitments. Mir Jafar was pensioned off.

Mir Qasim's reform and the customs confrontation

Mir Qasim was not willing to remain a ceremonial client. He shifted the capital from Murshidabad to Munger, farther from

Kolkata; reorganized revenue administration; reduced court rivals; and trained a modern army. These measures restored the capacity necessary for sovereignty.

Conflict centred again on private trade. Company servants claimed customs immunity, transferred *dastaks*, and compelled favorable transactions. Indian merchants paid duties and faced unequal competition. Mir Qasim's solution was to abolish internal duties for everyone. Formally, this created equality. Company officials opposed it because their privilege was valuable only while others remained taxable.

War followed in 1763. Company forces won at Katwa, Murshidabad, Giria, Udhwa Nala, and Munger. Mir Qasim fled to Awadh. Mir Jafar returned to the Bengal throne, but the conflict had expanded beyond Bengal.

Buxar: military victory and north Indian leverage

Mir Qasim allied with Shuja-ud-Daula, Nawab of Awadh, and Shah Alam II, the Mughal emperor. Their interests were not identical. Mir Qasim wanted restoration; Shuja sought territorial and political advantage; Shah Alam wanted an effective territorial base for imperial authority.

At Buxar on 22 October 1764, a Company army under Major Hector Munro defeated the alliance. Unlike Plassey, this was a sustained battle against the combined forces of major political authorities. Buxar demonstrated Company military organization and opened the way to influence in the middle Ganga plain.

The distinction is vital:

- **Plassey created political access to Bengal through conspiracy.**
- **Buxar confirmed military supremacy over Bengal's displaced nawab, Awadh, and the Mughal emperor.**
- **Allahabad converted the victory into recognized fiscal and strategic arrangements.**

The Allahabad settlement

Robert Clive returned to Bengal in 1765. He chose not to annex Awadh. Direct annexation would have created a long frontier exposed to Afghan and Maratha pressures. Restoring Shuja-ud-Daula created a buffer whose ruler would pay an indemnity and depend on Company support.

The August 1765 arrangements had connected components:

- Shuja-ud-Daula recovered most of Awadh, paid an indemnity of 50 lakh rupees, and accepted an alliance.
- Kora and Allahabad were transferred to Shah Alam II.
- Balwant Singh retained his position in Banaras under the settlement.
- Shah Alam II granted the Company the *diwani* of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.
- The Company agreed to pay the emperor an annual tribute of 26 lakh rupees.
- An annual amount was assigned to the nawab's establishment for *nizamat* expenses.

The emperor's grant mattered because Mughal sovereignty still carried legal and symbolic authority. Company officials did not discard the Mughal framework; they used it to legitimize a new fiscal power.

What Dual Government actually divided

The term "Dual Government" can mislead if treated as equal power-sharing. The Company held the decisive instruments:

- as *diwan*, it controlled revenue;
- through its army, it controlled external defence and coercive power;
- through its influence over the deputy *subahdar*, it controlled the *nizamat* indirectly;
- through the resident and council, it determined high politics.

The nawab retained the visible responsibility for police, crim-

inal justice, and administration but lacked independent money and military force. Indian deputies performed daily work. Muhammad Reza Khan served as deputy *naib nazim* and deputy *diwan* in Bengal; Raja Shitab Rai performed revenue functions in Bihar. Company officials avoided building a full administrative apparatus while extracting the fiscal return.

This was “power without responsibility” in a precise institutional sense. If order failed, the nawab’s officers could be blamed. If revenue arrived, the Company financed trade, dividends, military establishments, and remittances.

Economic and human consequences

Before Plassey, the Company imported bullion to buy Indian goods. After gaining political payments and revenue, it increasingly used Bengal income to finance its “investment,” meaning goods purchased for export. This altered the trade relation: Bengal’s own revenue bought goods exported for Company profit.

Private fortunes, presents, customs abuse, coercive purchasing, and revenue pressure disrupted established relationships among rulers, zamindars, merchants, bankers, artisans, and peasants. Yet the effects varied by locality and occupation; “instant deindustrialization in 1757” is too simple.

The famine of 1769–70 followed severe rainfall failure and crop loss. Its catastrophic mortality cannot be explained by climate alone. Revenue demands remained high, administrative responsibility was fragmented, grain markets were vulnerable to speculation and hoarding, and relief capacity was weak. Exact death totals are uncertain, but the demographic and fiscal shock was immense. The Company’s revenue did not fall in proportion to human suffering because assessments and collection pressures were adjusted slowly and unevenly.

By 1772 the arrangement was fiscally and politically discredited. Warren Hastings ended Dual Government, displaced the deputy structure, and moved revenue administration under more direct Company supervision. This did not create accountable

rule; it made colonial responsibility harder to conceal.

Interpretations and debates

P.J. Marshall emphasizes that Company empire grew through decisions by officials in India amid regional political openings, not through a single early blueprint imposed from London. Bengal supports this view: private trade, local rivalry, and a crisis over fortification accelerated intervention.

C.A. Bayly's fiscal-military emphasis explains why the 1765 *diwani* was more consequential than a simple territorial trophy. Revenue sustained troops, credit, commerce, and further conquest. Indian bankers and administrators were central to this mechanism.

Nationalist historians, including Bipan Chandra, emphasize plunder, unequal trade, and the transformation of Bengal revenue into the finance of Company commerce and expansion. This correctly identifies the colonial direction of transfer, though regional economic change should not be reduced to one date.

The nature of Plassey remains a useful debate. Calling it merely a battle exaggerates combat; calling it only an Indian betrayal hides Company planning and coercion. It was a corporate-backed coup made possible by a coalition of Company officials and Bengal elites.

Buxar has a stronger claim than Plassey to being the decisive military turning point. Plassey opened Bengal's court and treasury; Buxar defeated a wider alliance; Allahabad institutionalized the result. The turning point is therefore best understood as the chain **1757–65**, not one isolated event.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1717	Farrukhsiyar's <i>farman</i> confirms Company privileges	Later misuse of duty exemptions and <i>das-taks</i> turns commerce into a sovereignty dispute.
1727	Murshid Quli Khan dies	Bengal's autonomous provincial structure continues under successor nawabs.
1740–56	Alivardi Khan rules Bengal	Maintains autonomy, withstands Maratha incursions, and restrains European companies.
April 1756	Siraj-ud-Daulah succeeds Alivardi Khan	Court factionalism and Company defiance converge under a young nawab.
20 June 1756	Siraj captures Fort William and Kolkata	Forces the English to retreat to Fulta and seek military reinforcement.
Jan–Feb 1757	English recapture Kolkata; Treaty of Alinagar	Restores privileges but fails to settle the struggle over power.
March 1757	English capture French Chandernagore	Removes a possible French counterweight in Bengal.
23 June 1757	Battle of Plassey	Mir Jafar's contingent remains inactive; Siraj is defeated and killed.
1757–60	Mir Jafar's first nawabship	Company and private demands drain the treasury and deepen political dependence.
1759	English defeat a Dutch expedition near Biderra/Chinsurah	Removes another European challenge in Bengal.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1760	Mir Qasim replaces Mir Jafar	Gains the throne through an agreement involving territory and payments.
1762–63	Mir Qasim reforms administration and challenges trade privileges	Customs equality becomes the immediate issue in a wider struggle for sovereignty.
1763	Company defeats Mir Qasim; Mir Jafar restored	Mir Qasim retreats west and builds a wider alliance.
22 Oct 1764	Battle of Buxar	Hector Munro defeats Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-Daula, and Shah Alam II.
Feb 1765	Najm-ud-Daula becomes nawab under Company terms	Company secures control over the deputy who conducts the <i>nizamat</i> .
Aug 1765	Treaties of Allahabad and imperial <i>diwani</i> grant	Converts military victory into revenue authority and a strategic Awadh settlement.
1765–72	Dual Government	Company controls revenue and decisive power while Indian deputies conduct administration.
1770	Bengal famine	Climatic shock combines with institutional failure, high revenue pressure, and weak relief.
1772	Warren Hastings abolishes Dual Government	Ends the formal division and begins more direct Company revenue administration.

High-confusion comparisons

Feature	Plassey	Buxar
Date	23 June 1757	22 October 1764
Opponents	Company versus Siraj-ud-Daulah, with major defections	Company versus Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-Daula, and Shah Alam II
Character	Conspiracy-backed coup and limited battle	Sustained military contest
Company commander	Robert Clive	Hector Munro
Immediate result	Mir Jafar installed; payments and territorial concessions	Alliance defeated; Awadh and emperor exposed to Company terms
Long-term role	Political entry and access to Bengal wealth	Military supremacy leading to Allahabad and <i>diwani</i>

Term	Holder in theory	Effective position, 1765–72	Main function
<i>Diwani</i>	Company under Mughal grant	Company supervised Indian deputies and controlled revenue	Revenue collection and civil justice.
<i>Nizamat</i>	Nawab	Company controlled funds, army, and appointment of deputy	Defence, police, and criminal justice.
Dual Government	Company and nawab appeared to divide functions	Company held decisive power; nawab bore visible responsibility	Extraction without a full Company administrative apparatus.

Self-test

1. Why was Bengal commercially important to the English Company before 1757?
2. What was the difference between legitimate Company privilege and abuse of *dastaks*?
3. Name the four immediate issues in Siraj-ud-Daulah's conflict with the English.
4. Why is the traditional "Black Hole" narrative disputed?
5. Which groups and individuals formed the anti-Siraj coalition before Plassey?
6. Why was Plassey more a coup than a conventional battle?
7. What made Mir Jafar's position fiscally unsustainable?
8. Why did Mir Qasim abolish internal duties, and why did the Company object?
9. How did Buxar differ from Plassey?
10. What were the principal terms and strategic logic of the Allahabad settlement?
11. Distinguish *diwani* from *nizamat* under Dual Government.
12. Why is 1757–65 a better turning-point frame than either 1757 or 1764 alone?

Answer key

1. Bengal exported valuable textiles, silk, saltpetre, foodgrains, sugar, and indigo and provided a major share of English Asian imports through rich banking and trading networks.
2. The privilege covered specified corporate trade; servants extended passes to private inland goods and associates, depriving the nawab of customs and disadvantaging taxed merchants.
3. Customs abuse, unauthorized fortification, asylum to Krishna Das, and the companies' claim to wage independent war in Bengal.
4. Holwell's numbers, the room's capacity, contemporary corroboration, and evidence of deliberate orders are all doubtful; later imperial retellings magnified the incident.

5. Mir Jafar, Rai Durlabh, the Jagat Seth bankers, Omichand and other disaffected court, military, banking, and mercantile figures coordinated with Company officials led by Clive.
6. Major nawabi contingents remained inactive under prior agreement; only part of Siraj's army fought, and the planned defection determined the political result.
7. He had to fund the court and army while meeting enormous initial and continuing demands from the Company and its servants.
8. Abolition gave Indian and Company traders equal tax treatment; Company servants objected because their exemption lost its competitive value.
9. Plassey depended on conspiracy and limited combat; Buxar was a sustained victory over a three-power alliance including Awadh and the Mughal emperor.
10. Awadh was restored as a dependent buffer, Shuja paid 50 lakh rupees, Shah Alam received Kora and Allahabad, and the Company received *diwani* while paying annual tribute.
11. *Diwani* covered revenue and civil justice; *nizamat* covered defence, police, and criminal justice. The Company controlled the money, army, and deputy appointments behind both.
12. Plassey opened political and fiscal access, Buxar established wider military supremacy, and Allahabad converted both into recognized revenue authority.

Closing perspective

Bengal's wealth and institutional resilience attracted conquest; British rule did not arise because the province was economically empty or politically nonexistent. The 1717 *farman* became explosive when corporate privilege was stretched to cover private inland commerce.

Mysore, the Marathas, the Sikhs, and Company Expansion

Haidar Ali became Mysore's de facto ruler in 1761 and built a centralised military-fiscal state with French-trained infantry and artillery.

The First Anglo-Mysore War ended with the Treaty of Madras (1769), after Haidar appeared near Madras and forced mutual restitution.

A competitive military world, not a one-sided advance

The Company succeeded because it could combine Bengal's revenue, European credit, a regularly paid sepoy army, mobile artillery, fortified coastal bases, diplomacy and forces transferred between presidencies. Indian powers also innovated. Mysore manufactured weapons and disciplined infantry, Maratha commanders mastered mobile warfare and scorched-earth tactics, and Ranjit Singh created a powerful infantry-artillery system trained by European officers.

The decisive asymmetry was institutional endurance. The Company could survive a lost battle, replace commanders, raise loans and draw on several territorial bases. Its opponents often depended on a ruler, a court coalition or a confederate agree-

ment that did not survive succession disputes. The Company then turned one Indian power against another: Hyderabad and the Marathas against Mysore, rival Maratha houses against the Peshwa, and Dogra or Sikh court factions against Lahore.

Mysore: centralisation, commerce, and four wars

State-building under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan

Haidar Ali rose through the Mysore army and displaced the minister Nanjaraj while retaining the Wodeyar ruler as a nominal sovereign. He:

- trained infantry and artillery with French assistance;
- established an arms facility at Dindigul;
- reduced the autonomy of poligars and other local military chiefs;
- expanded towards Bednur, Kanara and Malabar;
- strengthened direct revenue collection to finance a permanent army.

Tipu Sultan continued this military-fiscal centralisation. He reorganised administration, encouraged sericulture and state trading, sought control of pepper, sandalwood and cardamom, and maintained diplomatic contacts with France, the Ottoman Empire, Afghanistan and Mauritius. His restriction of Company merchants and control of Malabar commerce made Mysore a commercial as well as military rival.

First Anglo-Mysore War, 1767--69

The Company, Hyderabad and the Marathas initially combined against Haidar. He neutralised the Marathas with payment, won over the Nizam, and shifted the war towards the Carnatic. His rapid march near Madras forced the Treaty of Madras. Its mutual-defence promise soon became the next grievance: when the

Marathas attacked Mysore in 1771, the Company did not assist Haidar.

Second Anglo-Mysore War, 1780--84

The immediate crisis was the British seizure of Mahé, a French port under Haidar's protection and a route for military supplies. Haidar entered the Carnatic, defeated Colonel Baillie's force at Pollilur, and captured Arcot. Eyre Coote checked Mysore at Porto Novo in 1781, while Company diplomacy detached Hyderabad and the Marathas. Haidar died in 1782, but Tipu continued the war. The Treaty of Mangalore restored territories and prisoners on both sides.

Third Anglo-Mysore War, 1790--92

Tipu's attack on Travancore, whose lines and purchases he regarded as violations of his rights over Cochin, provided the immediate cause. Cornwallis built a coalition with the Nizam and Marathas, captured Bengaluru, and besieged Srirangapatna. The 1792 settlement:

- divided roughly half of Mysore among the Company, Hyderabad and the Marathas;
- transferred Malabar, Dindigul and Baramahal to the Company;
- imposed an indemnity of three crore rupees;
- held two of Tipu's sons as hostages until payment.

Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, 1799

Wellesley used Tipu's French contacts to demand submission. The Company had Hyderabad's support, while the Marathas remained outside the fighting but had been offered territorial reward. Company armies converged on Srirangapatna; Tipu died during the assault. A child of the Wodeyar house became ruler of a reduced Mysore, accepted a subsidiary alliance, and ceded strategic territory. The Company directly occupied Ka-

nara, Wayanad, Coimbatore and Srirangapatna; Hyderabad received other districts.

Mysore was not annexed entirely because indirect rule reduced administrative cost while preserving strategic control. The Company assumed direct administration in 1831 on grounds of misgovernment and restored power to the Wodeyar ruler in 1881.

The Maratha confederacy: strength without durable unity

The Maratha political order combined the Peshwa at Pune with powerful houses: Sindhia at Gwalior, Holkar at Indore, Bhonsle at Nagpur and Gaekwad at Baroda. This structure allowed rapid expansion but complicated unified strategy. Chiefs possessed distinct armies, fiscal bases and diplomatic interests.

First Anglo-Maratha War, 1775--82

After Peshwa Madhavrao I died and Narayanrao was murdered, Raghunathrao claimed the office against the infant Madhavrao II and the Barabhai regency led by Nana Fadnavis. The Bombay government signed the Treaty of Surat (1775) with Raghunathrao for Salsette and Bassein. The Calcutta authorities replaced it with the Treaty of Purandhar (1776), but conflict resumed.

Mahadji Sindhia trapped the Bombay force at Wadgaon in 1779, severing supplies and exploiting the terrain. Warren Hastings rejected the surrender terms and sent reinforcements across India. After further fighting, the Treaty of Salbai:

- recognised Madhavrao II as Peshwa;
- ended British support for Raghunathrao;
- left Salsette with the Company;
- restored most other conquests;
- made Mahadji Sindhia guarantor of peace.

The result was not a clear Company victory. It bought the Company a long western peace while it concentrated on Mysore.

Second Anglo-Maratha War, 1803--05

After Nana Fadnavis died, conflict among Baji Rao II, Sindhia and Yashwantrao Holkar intensified. Holkar defeated the Peshwa and Sindhia near Pune in 1802. Baji Rao fled and accepted the Treaty of Bassein. Other Maratha chiefs regarded the treaty as a surrender of collective independence.

Arthur Wellesley defeated Sindhia and Bhonsle at Assaye and Argaon in the Deccan; Gerard Lake won at Delhi and Laswari in the north. The Treaties of Deogaon and Surji-Anjangaon compelled territorial cessions and British influence. Holkar resisted separately before settling in 1805–06. Bassein was decisive because it gave the Company strategic entry into the centre of Maratha politics.

Third Anglo-Maratha War, 1817--18

Lord Hastings first targeted the Pindaris, mobile raiding bands linked in varying degrees to Maratha patrons. The military encirclement of central India also placed every Maratha court under pressure. Baji Rao II attacked the British Residency at Pune; Bhonsle forces fought at Sitabuldi and Holkar's at Mahidpur. The Company defeated each centre separately.

Consequences:

- Peshwaship abolished; Baji Rao II pensioned at Bithur.
- Most Peshwa territory annexed to the Bombay Presidency.
- A reduced Satara kingdom created under a descendant of Shivaji.
- Nagpur and Indore lost territory and accepted tighter subordination.
- Company paramountcy became dominant across central and western India.

Why the Marathas lost

- Confederates lacked a binding command structure and pursued rival territorial interests.
- Succession conflicts repeatedly invited Company intervention.
- Chiefs negotiated separately after reverses, allowing defeat in detail.
- Military modernisation was uneven; artillery and disciplined infantry existed but were not integrated across the confederacy.
- Revenue collection depended heavily on tribute and military expansion, making prolonged coordinated war difficult.
- The Company possessed larger pooled finances and could re-deploy forces from Bengal, Madras and Bombay.
- The problem was not “national character.” Both sides employed Indians and Europeans, and Maratha forces demonstrated high tactical ability at Wadgaon, Assaye and elsewhere.

The Sikh kingdom and the conquest of Punjab

Ranjit Singh's state

Ranjit Singh, chief of the Sukerchakia misl, took Lahore in 1799 and united much of Punjab. The Treaty of Amritsar fixed the Sutlej as the boundary between his dominions and Company-protected cis-Sutlej states. Prevented from expanding east, he moved west to Multan (1818), Kashmir (1819) and Peshawar (effective control consolidated in the 1830s).

His kingdom combined Mughal administrative continuities, local clan authority and a centralised court. The army included the Fauj-i-Khas, trained by officers such as Jean-Baptiste Ventura and Jean-François Allard, with strong artillery under figures including Claude Auguste Court. Ranjit Singh balanced Sikh chiefs, Dogra nobles, Muslim officials and newer military commanders.

This balance, more than religious uniformity, held the kingdom together.

Crisis after 1839

Rapid deaths, assassinations and factional conflict followed Ranjit Singh. The Khalsa army developed regimental panchayats and became an autonomous political actor. Court leaders sought to control it while fearing its power. The Company increased troops near the Sutlej and prepared for conflict. The Sikh crossing of the river in December 1845 triggered war, but responsibility remains disputed because British forward preparations and Lahore's internal struggle preceded it.

First Anglo-Sikh War, 1845--46

Major battles occurred at Mudki, Ferozeshah, Aliwal and Sohraon. The Khalsa fought effectively, but commanders Lal Singh and Tej Singh were accused of treachery or deliberate inaction. The Treaty of Lahore:

- ceded the Jalandhar Doab;
- reduced the Khalsa army;
- imposed an indemnity;
- placed a British Resident at Lahore;
- recognised the minor Duleep Singh.

Because Lahore could not pay the full indemnity, Kashmir was transferred to Gulab Singh under the Treaty of Amritsar (16 March 1846) for 75 lakh rupees. The Treaty of Bhairawal later in 1846 removed Maharani Jind Kaur as regent and gave the Resident decisive authority over a council of regency.

Second Anglo-Sikh War, 1848--49

The Multan revolt began when Diwan Mulraj resisted replacement and two British officers were killed. Sher Singh Attariwala, sent to suppress the revolt, joined it; Chattar Singh also rebelled.

Battles at Ramnagar and Chillianwala were costly and inconclusive, but the Company victory at Gujarat on 21 February 1849 broke organised resistance. Duleep Singh signed the annexation instrument on 29 March 1849. Punjab was first governed by a Board of Administration and from 1853 by a Chief Commissioner under John Lawrence.

Sindh: treaty pressure becomes annexation

The Talpur Amirs ruled Sindh after displacing the Kalhoras. Company interest combined Indus commerce, fear of French and later Russian influence, and the strategic requirements of the Afghan frontier. A commercial treaty opened the Indus and roads in 1832. During the First Afghan War, the Amirs were compelled to permit troop movement, accept a British Resident, pay money and surrender foreign-policy freedom.

After the Afghan disaster, Governor-General Ellenborough and Charles Napier demanded a new treaty and territorial concessions. Resistance produced the battles of Miani (17 February 1843) and Dabo/Dubba (24 March). Sindh was annexed. The conquest was controversial even among British observers because earlier agreements had promised territorial integrity and the alleged threat was weak.

Interpretations and debates

- Burton Stein characterises Tipu Sultan's system as "military fiscalism": wider direct taxation financed a centralised army and reduced intermediaries. This explains both Mysore's strength and the burdens created by constant war.
- Kate Brittlebank stresses that Tipu's kingship drew on regional traditions and selective Islamic symbols rather than fitting a simple "foreign" or purely religious model. His patronage of Hindu institutions also resists communal caricature.

- Expansion was neither wholly accidental nor produced by a single master plan. Commercial disputes, local alliances and frontier crises created opportunities, but governors such as Wellesley deliberately manufactured conditions for wider control.
- Maratha defeat should not be explained through moral decline. The confederacy’s distributed sovereignty could generate resilience, but it made unified command and common diplomacy difficult during simultaneous crises.
- The First Sikh War has a disputed responsibility. A narrow account treats the Khalsa crossing of the Sutlej as aggression; a wider account includes Company troop concentration, Lahore instability and officials’ expectation of annexation.
- Punjab’s fall did not show military inferiority alone. Leadership betrayal, factional conflict, disrupted finance and the dependent settlement of 1846 were crucial.
- Sindh’s annexation is widely treated as an example of aggressive imperialism: strategic anxieties were converted into escalating treaty demands until resistance provided a pretext for conquest.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1761	Haidar Ali becomes de facto ruler of Mysore	Mysore emerges as a centralised military competitor to the Company.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1767–69	First Anglo-Mysore War	Haidar breaks the hostile coalition and carries war to the gates of Madras.
4 Apr 1769	Treaty of Madras	Conquests are re-stored and mutual assistance promised.
1775–82	First Anglo-Maratha War	Company intervention in a Peshwa succession dispute meets coordinated Maratha resistance.
Jan 1779	Convention of Wadgaon	Bombay's force is surrounded and compelled to surrender its gains.
1780–84	Second Anglo-Mysore War	Mysore exploits British breach of the 1769 alliance and the wider Anglo-French war.
17 May 1782	Treaty of Salbai signed; ratification completed by 1783	Ends the First Anglo-Maratha War and stabilises Company-Maratha relations.
7 Dec 1782	Death of Haidar Ali	Tipu Sultan continues the war without a political collapse.
11 Mar 1784	Treaty of Mangalore	Restores conquests and prisoners; demonstrates Mysore's continuing strength.
1790–92	Third Anglo-Mysore War	Company combines with Hyderabad and the Marathas against Tipu.
Mar 1792	Treaty of Seringapatam	Mysore loses about half its territory, pays an indemnity, and gives hostages.

Date	Event	Why it matters
4 May 1799	Fall of Srirangapatna and death of Tipu	Independent Mysorean resistance ends; Wodeyars re-stored under British control.
31 Dec 1802	Treaty of Bassein	Baji Rao II accepts British troops and control over external relations.
1803–05	Second Anglo-Maratha War	Sindhia and Bhonsle are defeated; Maratha powers are separated and subordinated.
25 Apr 1809	Treaty of Amritsar	Sutlej becomes the limit of Ranjit Singh's eastward expansion.
1817–18	Third Anglo-Maratha War	Peshwa, Bhonsle and Holkar are defeated; Peshwaship is abolished.
1839	Death of Ranjit Singh	Court conflict and the politicisation of the Khalsa army destabilise Lahore.
1843	Battles of Miani and Dabo; Sindh annexed	Company frontier advances to the lower Indus.
1845–46	First Anglo-Sikh War	Lahore loses the Jalandhar Doab and effective control over its government.
1848–49	Second Anglo-Sikh War	Punjab is annexed after Multan, Chillianwala and Gujarat.

High-confusion comparisons

Conflict	Immediate trigger	Decisive Company advantage	Settlement/outcome	Common trap
First Mysore War	Company-led coalition	Haidar neutralised allies; no decisive Company advantage	Madras, 1769	It ended in Company humiliation, not Mysore's defeat.
Second Mysore War	Mahé seizure and treaty breach	Detaching Hyderabad/Marathas; Eyre Coote	Mangalore, 1784	Haidar died before peace; Tipu signed it.
Third Mysore War	Tipu–Travancore dispute	Coalition under Cornwallis	Seringapatam, 1792	Tipu survived and remained ruler.
Fourth Mysore War	Wellesley's demands and French-contact charge	Hyderabad alliance and converging armies	Tipu killed; reduced client Mysore	Mysore was not wholly annexed.
First Maratha War	Peshwa succession	Company recovered after Wadgaon with Bengal forces	Salbai, 1782	Not a decisive British conquest.
Second Maratha War	Treaty of Bassein	Separate campaigns and treaties	1803–05 settlements	Holkar fought separately.
Third Maratha War	Pindari campaign and Peshwa attack	Encirclement and defeat in detail	Peshwaship abolished	Date often compressed to 1817–18; some settlement continued into 1819.
First Sikh War	Sutlej crossing amid mutual preparation	Leadership failures and resources	Lahore/Bhairowal, 1846	Punjab was not annexed yet.
Second Sikh War	Multan revolt broadens	Reinforcement after costly battles	Punjab annexed, 1849	Gujarat is a town in Punjab, not western India's Gujarat.

Self-test

1. Why was Mysore a commercial as well as military threat to the Company?
2. What did the Treaty of Madras require, and how did its failure contribute to renewed war?
3. Distinguish the outcomes of the Treaties of Mangalore and Seringapatam.
4. Why was the Treaty of Bassein a turning point in Maratha history?
5. What happened to the Peshwaship after the Third Anglo-Maratha War?
6. Give four structural reasons for Maratha defeat.
7. How did the Treaty of Amritsar (1809) redirect Ranjit Singh's expansion?
8. Why did the Khalsa army become a political power after 1839?
9. Distinguish the settlements after the First and Second Anglo-Sikh Wars.
10. Which events converted British commercial access in Sindh into annexation?
11. Locate Srirangapatna, Wadgaon, Chillianwala and Miani by present-day region.
12. Was Company conquest accidental or planned? Give a balanced answer.

Answer key

1. Mysore controlled Malabar pepper, sandalwood and cardamom routes, restricted Company trade, cultivated French links, and financed a modern army through a centralised revenue system.
2. It required restitution and mutual defence; the Company refused aid when Marathas attacked Haidar in 1771, deepening mistrust before the Second War.
3. Mangalore (1784) broadly restored conquests and parity; Seringapatam (1792) took about half Mysore, imposed three crore rupees and hostages.

4. Baji Rao II accepted a permanent British force and surrendered independent diplomacy, provoking other Maratha chiefs and enabling Company intervention at the confederacy's centre.
5. It was abolished; Baji Rao II was pensioned at Bithur and most of his territory was annexed.
6. Rival confederate interests, separate diplomacy, uneven military integration, succession crises, dependence on tribute, and weaker pooled finance; any four.
7. It fixed the Sutlej as his eastern boundary, so he expanded west towards Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar.
8. Succession conflict weakened the court, while regimental panchayats controlled a large, armed and politically conscious force that rulers could not reliably command.
9. In 1846 Lahore lost territory, reduced its army and accepted Residency control; in 1849 Punjab was annexed outright.
10. The 1832 commercial opening, coercive Afghan-war treaties, Residency and payment demands, further territorial demands, resistance, and Napier's victories at Miani and Dabo.
11. Srirangapatna: Karnataka; Wadgaon: Maharashtra; Chillianwala: Punjab in Pakistan; Miani: Sindh in Pakistan.
12. Local wars and alliances produced contingencies, but repeated strategic choices, manufactured threats and policies under expansionist governors created an increasingly deliberate imperial direction.

Closing perspective

Company conquest depended on pooled finance, disciplined forces, alliance politics and the ability to recover after setbacks. Mysore, the Marathas and Punjab each developed serious military capacity; none was defeated because Indians lacked technology or courage.

Paramountcy, Annexation, and the Frontier

The ring-fence policy treated neighbouring states, especially Awadh, as buffers whose rulers paid for Company-organised defence.

Subsidiary Alliance reached its aggressive form under Lord Wellesley (1798–1805): British troops, subsidy or territory, a Resident, and loss of independent diplomacy.

Paramountcy was control without a single constitutional definition

Paramountcy meant that the Company, and later the Crown, claimed superiority over Indian rulers. Its practical content expanded over time:

1. military assistance and buffer defence;
2. payment for Company troops;
3. permanent British force and Resident;
4. restrictions on war, treaties and employment of Europeans;
5. control of ministers, succession and territorial disputes;
6. intervention for alleged disorder or misgovernment;
7. annexation or dependent survival at British discretion.

Treaties appeared bilateral, but the Company increasingly interpreted them unilaterally. Indian rulers retained courts, titles

and varying internal powers, yet could not conduct independent foreign policy. A Resident's advice could become an order without formally abolishing the state.

Ring fence: buffers financed by their rulers

The ring-fence approach is associated especially with Warren Hastings. Bengal was the Company's main revenue base, while Maratha power and possible Afghan invasion created insecurity beyond it. Awadh therefore served as a buffer. The Company undertook to organise defence, but the Nawab paid for the force.

The arrangement produced a self-expanding logic:

- higher military costs increased the ruler's fiscal dependence;
- arrears justified further pressure;
- Company officers acquired influence at court;
- the buffer's frontier became a Company security concern;
- territory could be demanded when cash payment failed.

Ring fence was not yet a universal blueprint for domination. It was a defensive language that made intervention and military financing appear compatible with the ally's sovereignty.

Subsidiary Alliance: the architecture of dependent sovereignty

Wellesley systematised earlier practices during the global war with France. The alliance usually required an Indian ruler to:

- accept a permanent Company force within or near the state;
- pay a subsidy or cede territory for its maintenance;
- accept a British Resident at court;
- avoid war or negotiation without Company approval;
- dismiss or exclude non-British Europeans;
- submit disputes with other states to Company arbitration.

The Company promised defence against external and internal enemies and formally promised non-interference in domestic affairs. The promise was structurally weak: a Resident, an unpaid subsidy or a disputed succession always provided grounds to intervene.

Four-stage memory model

1. **Troops for a specific war:** Company soldiers assist an ally.
2. **Joint campaign:** Company and allied forces fight together.
3. **Permanent contingent for money:** Company recruits and commands troops paid by the ruler.
4. **Territory instead of cash:** districts are ceded when the assessed subsidy cannot be paid.

Major acceptances

State/power	Date	Strategic result
Hyderabad	1798; revised 1800	French-trained corps removed; large territorial cession finances force.
Mysore	1799	Reduced Wodeyar state survives under British military control.
Tanjore	1799	Ruler retains title while administration and revenue pass largely to Company.
Awadh	1801	Major territorial cession; military dependence deepens.
Peshwa	1802	Bassein subordinates the confederacy's nominal head.

State/power	Date	Strategic result
Bhonsle	1803	Settlement after defeat restricts diplomacy and cedes territory.
Sindhia	1804	British influence follows the Second Maratha War.
Rajput states	1817–18	Protection treaties extend paramountcy across Rajasthan.
Holkar	1818	Last major Maratha house enters the subordinate framework.

A common chronology error dates Bassein to December 1801; the treaty was signed on 31 December 1802.

Political and economic effects

- Indian states lost external sovereignty without necessarily being annexed.
- The ruler's army was reduced while a foreign-controlled force occupied strategic positions.
- Subsidy payments diverted revenue from administration and could lead to territorial cession.
- Protected rulers became less accountable to subjects because Company force insulated them from internal opposition.
- Residents fostered court factions, influenced appointments and sometimes made administration less stable.
- Company troops could be stationed throughout India without the Company paying their full cost.
- French and other European influence was excluded.
- Separate alliances isolated Indian powers and prevented coalitions.

Residency and subordinate isolation, 1813--57

After 1813 the Company increasingly treated states as subordinate components of an imperial system. Residents changed from diplomatic agents into supervising officials. The ruler retained internal administration in theory, but succession, external contacts, military organisation and sometimes ministerial appointment required approval.

Michael Fisher identifies a useful three-phase pattern of indirect rule:

- **1764–97:** cautious, limited Residencies at Murshidabad, Awadh and Hyderabad.
- **1798–1840:** aggressive expansion under Wellesley and his successors; Residents become instruments of control.
- **1841–57:** after the Afghan failure, consolidation and direct annexation become more prominent, culminating under Dalhousie.

This period is often called subordinate isolation because the states were separated from one another diplomatically and connected vertically to the Company.

Annexation: conquest, lapse, cession, and misgovernment

British expansion did not rest on one doctrine.

Conquest

Mysore's core territories, Maratha dominions, Sindh, Punjab and Burmese provinces were acquired through war and imposed settlements.

Cession for debt or subsidy

Awadh's 1801 cession and Hyderabad's assignment of Berar in 1853 translated military charges into territorial control.

Doctrine of Lapse

The paramount power claimed that an adopted heir could inherit private property but not rulership unless British authority recognised the succession. Adoption was valid in Hindu law, and there was no consistent indigenous rule that a state without a natural male heir automatically passed to an overlord. Dalhousie did not originate the claim, but he applied it with exceptional zeal.

Major absorptions associated with lapse included:

- Satara, 1848;
- Jaitpur and Sambalpur, 1849;
- Udaipur in the Central Provinces, 1852;
- Nagpur, 1853–54;
- Jhansi, 1854.

Baghat was briefly taken over but later restored, so it should not be memorised as a simple permanent lapse annexation. Dates can differ between the ruler's death, the annexation decision and administrative incorporation; exam answers should use the standard notification year where known.

Misgovernment

Awadh was annexed in 1856 after Wajid Ali Shah refused to hand administration to the Company while retaining only his title. This was not a lapse case. British officials had long controlled Awadh's military and external environment, making the claim that misrule was entirely autonomous deeply contradictory.

The annexation displaced the court, officials, soldiers and dependants; threatened taluqdars; and angered Bengal Army sepoys whose homes lay in Awadh. It became a major background to the Revolt of 1857.

The frontier system: commerce, buffers, and the Great Game

Frontier policy served three connected objectives:

- protect the Indian empire from rival European powers, especially Russia and France;
- open markets and obtain strategic commodities, routes and river access;
- push instability away from directly ruled territory by creating buffers or controlling mountain passes.

The idea of a “scientific frontier” suggested that defensible geography could solve political insecurity. In practice, every forward move created a new border, new local resistance and another demand for intervention. The interests were imperial, while Indian soldiers and Indian revenues bore much of the cost.

Nepal and the Himalayan foothills

Gorkha expansion brought Nepal into conflict with the Company over Butwal and Sheoraj after the annexation of Gorakhpur. The Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–16) exposed the difficulty of mountain campaigning. The Treaty of Sugauli was signed in December 1815 and ratified in 1816. Nepal:

- accepted a British Resident;
- ceded Kumaon and Garhwal;
- abandoned claims to much of the Terai, parts of which were later restored;
- withdrew from Sikkim.

The Company gained Himalayan access and hill-station sites. Gorkha recruitment into the Company’s forces developed after the war. Nepal remained independent rather than becoming a princely state.

Burma: three wars and complete annexation

First Anglo-Burmese War, 1824--26

Burmese expansion into Arakan, Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia created a fluid frontier with Bengal. Company troops captured Rangoon but suffered severe losses from disease and logistics. The Treaty of Yandabo required Burma to:

- cede Arakan and Tenasserim;
- abandon claims to Assam, Cachar and Jaintia;
- recognise Manipur;
- pay an indemnity;
- accept diplomatic and commercial relations.

Second Anglo-Burmese War, 1852

Commercial disputes at Rangoon and Dalhousie's expansionism led to war. The Company annexed Pegu, completing its control of Lower Burma's coastline. Guerrilla resistance continued after formal conquest.

Third Anglo-Burmese War, 1885

King Thibaw's commercial contacts with France and a dispute involving the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation provided the immediate pretexts. Mandalay fell quickly and Upper Burma was annexed from 1 January 1886, but rural resistance required years of military suppression. Burma was separated administratively from India on 1 April 1937 under arrangements made by the Government of India Act 1935, not in 1935 itself.

Afghanistan and the north-west: forward policy versus restraint

First Anglo-Afghan War, 1839--42

Governor-General Auckland feared Russian and Persian influence and rejected Dost Mohammad's request for help recovering Peshawar. The Tripartite Treaty with Ranjit Singh and the exiled Shah Shuja aimed to install a friendly Afghan ruler. British forces occupied Kabul, but Shah Shuja lacked legitimacy. The 1841 uprising destroyed the retreating Kabul garrison. A punitive expedition reoccupied Kabul in 1842 and withdrew; Dost Mohammad returned.

The war showed the limits of client rule beyond India. It cost Indian revenue heavily and caused enormous military losses without creating a stable buffer.

Masterly inactivity

John Lawrence's policy in the 1860s avoided intervention in Afghan succession so long as frontier peace held and no contender obtained decisive foreign military support. It was restraint grounded in the experience of 1839–42, not indifference to Afghanistan.

Second Anglo-Afghan War, 1878--80

Viceroy Lytton's "proud reserve" or forward policy demanded a British mission after a Russian mission reached Kabul. Sher Ali refused, and war followed. The Treaty of Gandamak (May 1879) with Yaqub Khan ceded frontier districts, accepted British influence over foreign relations and admitted a Resident. The Resident, Louis Cavagnari, was killed in Kabul, causing renewed war. Abdur Rahman was eventually recognised as Amir; Britain controlled external relations while avoiding permanent occupation of Kabul.

Durand Line and North-West Frontier Province

The Durand Agreement of 1893 marked a boundary between Afghan and British spheres. It divided Pashtun communities and did not end frontier resistance. Curzon later withdrew regular troops from some advanced posts, relied on tribal levies and concentrated forces. In 1901 he created the North-West Frontier Province from Punjab frontier districts.

Bhutan and Tibet

The Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864–65 ended with the Treaty of Sinchula. Bhutan ceded the Bengal and Assam Duars and received an annual subsidy. The ceded foothills later became important tea-growing zones.

Curzon interpreted limited Chinese authority in Tibet and reports of Russian influence as strategic danger. Francis Younghusband's mission entered Tibet in 1903–04; Tibetan forces were overwhelmed at Guru and the Dalai Lama fled before the expedition reached Lhasa. The 1904 convention imposed an indemnity, trade marts and restrictions on foreign concessions. London later reduced the indemnity and occupation period. The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 recognised Chinese suzerainty as the framework through which both powers would deal with Tibet.

After 1858: annexation retreats, paramountcy deepens

The Revolt changed the preferred technique. Many princes had supported the British, and Canning described them as breakwaters against future storms. The Crown generally:

- guaranteed territorial integrity;
- recognised adoption rights;
- punished or deposed rulers without normally annexing states;

- used princes as conservative allies against nationalism;
- reserved control over external affairs, defence and communications;
- intervened through Residents in succession and administration.

The shift was from **subordinate isolation** to **subordinate union**. The Queen's title Empress of India and Curzon's language of princes as agents of the Crown made clear that ceremonial honour did not equal sovereignty.

Interpretations and debates

- Edward Ingram argues that Wellesley did more than react to disorder: he could redefine calm or turbulence to create conditions for expansion. French danger mattered politically, but it was also a persuasive justification for policies already desired.
- Michael Fisher's three phases of indirect rule show that Residency was not static. Cautious diplomacy became executive supervision and then coexisted with annexation.
- The alliance system can be described as protection, but protection was purchased through surrender of the means of independent action. The contradiction is central to any evaluation.
- Dalhousie's annexations were not all products of the Doctrine of Lapse. Conquest, lapse, debt assignment and misgovernment must be kept analytically separate.
- The "Great Game" was real as Anglo-Russian rivalry, but threat perceptions were often exaggerated. Afghanistan and Tibet were not empty chessboards; local rulers and societies had independent objectives.
- The frontier was not a fixed natural line waiting to be found. Each supposedly scientific boundary produced new minorities, divided communities and continuing resistance.
- Post-1858 non-annexation did not restore sovereignty. It made princely states more useful as inexpensive subordinate

allies and buffers against popular politics.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1765	Company undertakes Awadh's defence at the Nawab's expense	Early ring-fence arrangement protects Bengal through a buffer.
1787	Carnatic treaty restricts foreign relations	Anticipates a central clause of Subsidiary Alliance.
1798	Hyderabad accepts Wellesley's alliance	French-trained forces dismissed; British strategic foothold enlarged.
1799	Reduced Mysore enters subsidiary system	Victory over Tipu is converted into durable indirect control.
1800	Hyderabad cedes territory for subsidiary-force costs	Shows the shift from cash subsidy to territorial payment.
1801	Awadh cedes Rohilkhand and the lower Doab	Company's buffer becomes a dependent state with reduced territory.
31 Dec 1802	Treaty of Bassein	Peshwa surrenders independent defence and diplomacy.
1814–16	Anglo-Nepalese War	Company secures Kumaon, Garhwal and influence in Sikkim.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1817–18	Rajput states and remaining Maratha powers accept subordination	Company paramountcy becomes subcontinental.
1824–26	First Anglo-Burmese War	Arakan and Tenasserim ceded; Burmese claims over Assam and Manipur withdrawn.
1832	Indus opened to British commerce	Commercial access precedes coercive control in Sindh.
1838	Tripartite Treaty with Shah Shuja and Ranjit Singh	Launching point for forward intervention in Afghanistan.
1839–42	First Anglo-Afghan War	Attempted client rule collapses in a costly retreat and punitive return.
1843	Sindh annexed	Frontier strategy and treaty escalation culminate in conquest.
1848	Satara annexed under lapse principle	First major Dalhousie-era application.
1849	Punjab annexed	Direct frontier now reaches the north-western borderlands.
1852	Second Anglo-Burmese War	Pegu annexed; Company controls the Burmese coast.
1853	Berar assigned by Hyderabad	Territory secures unpaid subsidiary-force obligations.
1854	Jhansi and Nagpur absorbed in the lapse cycle	Adoption and succession become instruments of annexation.
1856	Awadh annexed for alleged misgovernment	Produces major elite, peasant and sepoy grievances before 1857.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1858	Crown rule and non-annexation turn	Princes retained as allies; adoption rights generally recognised.
1864–65	Anglo-Bhutan War and Treaty of Sinchula	Duars ceded in return for an annual subsidy.
1876–77	Victoria assumes title Empress of India; Delhi Imperial Assemblage	Symbolically asserts Crown supremacy over British and princely India.
1878–80	Second Anglo-Afghan War	Gandamak briefly installs a Resident; later settlement makes Afghanistan a buffer.
1885–86	Upper Burma invaded and annexed	Completes British conquest of Burma; resistance continues.
1893	Durand Agreement	Demarcates spheres between Afghanistan and British India, dividing Pashtun regions.
1901	North-West Frontier Province created	Frontier districts separated from Punjab administration.
1903–04	Younghusband expedition to Tibet	Trade and strategic demands imposed at Lhasa.
1907	Anglo-Russian Convention	Britain and Russia agree to deal with Tibet through China.

High-confusion comparisons

Mechanism	What the ruler retained	What the British gained	Example	Exam trap
Ring fence	Internal rule and formal diplomacy	Paid buffer defence and influence	Awadh after 1765	Earlier and less systematised than Wellesley's alliance.
Subsidiary Alliance	Throne and nominal internal rule	Troops, subsidy/territory, Resident, external control	Hyderabad, Mysore, Bassein	It did not automatically annex the state.
Doctrine of Lapse	Private inheritance for adopted heir	Claimed right to deny political succession	Satara, Jhansi, Nagpur	Awadh was not annexed under lapse.
Misgovernment annexation	Usually nothing after deposition	Direct administration	Awadh, 1856	Company already constrained Awadh before judging its rule.
Subordinate union after 1858	Dynasty, territory, ceremony, internal powers	Defence, external affairs, intervention rights	Princely India	End of annexation did not mean equality.

Frontier	Wars	Main settlement	Strategic outcome	Common confusion
Nepal	1814–16	Sugauli	Himalayan access; Nepal independent	Treaty signed 1815, ratified 1816.
Burma	1824–26, 1852, 1885	Yandabo; later procla- mations	Arakan/Tenasserim, Pegu, then Upper Burma	Administrative sepa- ration took effect in 1937.
Afghanistan	1839–42, 1878–80, 1919	Gandamak relevant to second war	Buffer and external in- fluence, never durable occupation	Second war began in 1878, not 1870.
Bhutan	1864–65	Sinchula	Duars ceded for sub- sidy	Distinguish Bhutan War from Tibet expedition.
Tibet	1903–04	Lhasa Convention	Trade marts and strate- gic restrictions	Anglo-Russian Conven- tion followed in 1907.

Self-test

1. What was the ring-fence policy, and why was Awadh central to it?
2. List the six typical obligations imposed by a Subsidiary Alliance.
3. How did a Resident change from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century?
4. Why was Subsidiary Alliance financially advantageous to the Company?
5. Distinguish annexation by lapse from annexation for misgovernment with one example each.
6. Name four important states absorbed or denied succession under the lapse policy.
7. What did Nepal concede under the Treaty of Sugauli?
8. Match each Burmese War with its principal territorial result.
9. Why did the First Anglo-Afghan War fail politically?
10. Distinguish masterly inactivity from proud reserve.
11. What were the purposes and limitations of the Durand Agreement?
12. Why did the British abandon routine annexation of princely states after 1858 without abandoning paramountcy?

Answer key

1. It used neighbouring states as buffers defended by Company-organised troops at their own expense; Awadh shielded Bengal from north-western and Maratha threats.
2. Permanent British force, subsidy or territory, Resident, no independent war/treaty, exclusion of non-British Europeans, and Company arbitration/control of disputes.
3. The Resident moved from cautious diplomatic contact to supervision of ministers, succession, finance, diplomacy and internal administration.
4. Indian revenues paid Company-controlled troops stationed strategically across India, while arrears could justify territorial cession.

5. Lapse denied political succession to an adopted heir, as in Jhansi; misgovernment deposed a ruler based on administrative allegations, as in Awadh.
6. Satara, Jaitpur, Sambalpur, Udaipur in the Central Provinces, Nagpur and Jhansi; any four.
7. Kumaon and Garhwal, withdrawal from Sikkim, abandonment of claims to much of the Terai, and acceptance of a British Resident.
8. First: Arakan and Tenasserim; second: Pegu/Lower Burma; third: Upper Burma and complete annexation.
9. Shah Shuja lacked local legitimacy, occupation provoked resistance, supply lines were vulnerable, and coercion could not create a durable client regime.
10. Masterly inactivity avoided intervention in Afghan succession unless external danger became decisive; proud reserve used forward pressure, missions and war to control the buffer.
11. It marked British and Afghan spheres and sought frontier clarity, but divided Pashtun communities and did not end resistance or settle later interstate disputes.
12. Princes had aided the British in 1857 and could serve as low-cost conservative allies; the Crown preserved dynasties while retaining defence, diplomacy and intervention rights.

Closing perspective

Paramountcy was a changing practice of superior authority, not a stable relationship between equal treaty partners. Ring fence protected Company territory by transferring defence costs to neighbouring rulers.

Part II

Colonial institutions, economy, reform, and resistance

Building the Colonial State before 1857

The Company acquired Bengal's *diwani* in 1765 but did not assume direct revenue administration until Warren Hastings ended Dual Government in 1772.

The Regulating Act of 1773 created a Governor-General of Bengal with a council and a Supreme Court at Kolkata (Calcutta), but left overlapping jurisdictions.

The administrative problem had three levels

The conquest of Bengal created three linked questions. First, who controlled the Company in Britain? Second, which authority coordinated Bengal, Chennai (Madras), and Mumbai (Bombay) in India? Third, how would a small European cadre extract revenue and maintain order in districts inhabited by millions?

The answer was a nested structure:

1. **Metropolitan control:** Parliament, the cabinet, Board of Control, Court of Directors, and Court of Proprietors.
2. **Central government in India:** Governor-General-in-Council, later Governor-General of India-in-Council.
3. **Presidency governments:** Bengal, Chennai, and Mumbai, increasingly subordinated in war and diplomacy.
4. **Field administration:** divisions and districts led by commissioners, collectors, magistrates, judges, and police officers in

changing combinations.

5. **Indian establishment:** deputy collectors, *amlas*, *munsifs*, *sadr amins*, qazis, pandits, *darogas*, village watchmen, clerks, and revenue intermediaries.

Formal hierarchy should not hide practical dependence.

Europeans occupied senior posts, but Indian knowledge, languages, record-keeping, credit, and local authority made daily administration possible.

From Company autonomy to parliamentary supervision

The Company's financial crisis, political scandals, territorial wars, and the fortunes of returning "nabobs" pushed Parliament to intervene. Regulation also let the British state share imperial power without immediately abolishing the corporation.

Regulating Act, 1773. Warren Hastings became the first Governor-General of Bengal, assisted by a four-member council. Mumbai and Chennai were subordinated to Bengal in matters of war and peace, though communication delays weakened control. A Supreme Court at Kolkata consisted of a chief justice and three puisne judges. The act was pioneering but defective: the Governor-General could be outvoted, and the court interpreted its jurisdiction broadly over people connected to Kolkata and the Company.

Act of Settlement, 1781. Parliament exempted official revenue acts from ordinary Supreme Court interference, limited jurisdiction beyond Kolkata, and instructed courts to respect Hindu and Muslim personal law in relevant matters. The measure reduced, rather than eliminated, legal pluralism.

Pitt's India Act, 1784. A Board of Control, including cabinet ministers, supervised civil, military, and revenue policy. The Court of Directors retained appointments and commercial management. A secret committee could transmit sensitive orders. This "double government" meant neither corporate indepen-

dence nor full Crown administration: the state directed policy through Company machinery.

Act of 1786. Cornwallis could override his council in exceptional cases and hold the offices of Governor-General and commander-in-chief together. Executive concentration became a durable feature.

Charter Acts converted a merchant corporation into an administrative agency

The Charter Act of 1793 renewed the framework and Company monopoly. In 1813, private British merchants gained access to Indian trade, while the Company retained tea and China commerce and political authority. Missionaries received greater legal access.

The Charter Act of 1833 ended the remaining commercial monopoly. The Company became an administrative trustee under tighter state direction. The Governor-General of Bengal became Governor-General of India; the council received a law member for legislative work; presidency legislative autonomy narrowed; and the First Law Commission became possible. A clause declared that office should not be denied because of religion, place of birth, descent, or colour, but senior-service exclusion remained in practice.

The Charter Act of 1853 added legislative members to the Governor-General's Council and separated its legislative meetings from ordinary executive business. It did not create responsible government. Competitive civil-service recruitment reduced director patronage, yet the London examination, classical curriculum, travel costs, and age rules kept access highly unequal.

The Governor-General and presidency governments

The Governor-General-in-Council was an executive, legislative, diplomatic, and military authority, not a cabinet responsible to an elected legislature. Bengal's superior revenue and army gave it early weight. Pitt's India Act strengthened its control over presidency war and diplomacy. The 1833 act centralized legislation for British India.

Presidencies remained important administrative-military units. Each had a governor or governor-in-council, a civil establishment, courts, revenue arrangements, and an army. Local conditions produced different practices: Permanent Settlement in much of Bengal, Ryotwari in much of Chennai and Mumbai, and evolving village or *mahal* arrangements farther north. Centralization therefore coexisted with regional variation.

The district collector: the local hinge

The collector began as a revenue officer, but revenue could not be separated neatly from coercion. To collect assessment, officials needed land records, police, courts, and authority over intermediaries. The collector consequently became the main face of Company government.

The office changed:

- Hastings placed collectors over district civil courts while Indian officers conducted criminal courts.
- Cornwallis separated revenue collection from judicial office in the 1790s and installed district judges.
- Bentinck later abolished provincial circuit courts and returned magisterial and police functions to the collector-magistrate under commissioners.

This oscillation reflected a real dilemma. Separation promised legal restraint but required more expensive European officers. Concentration was cheaper and faster but made one executive

officer exceptionally powerful.

Civil services: competence, patronage, and racial monopoly

Company servants were divided broadly into **covenanted** higher officials and **uncovenanted** subordinate personnel. Covenanted officers signed service agreements and held posts in revenue, justice, diplomacy, and administration. Indians filled most lower positions but were excluded from authority and high salaries.

Cornwallis attacked private trade, gifts, and low official salaries. He increased remuneration to reduce corruption, enforced promotion by seniority, and reserved senior covenanted office for Europeans. The result was a more professional but racially insulated elite. Administration became less openly patrimonial at the top while remaining dependent on Indian subordinates below.

Wellesley founded Fort William College in 1800 to teach languages, law, and administration. The directors opposed his control over training and established Haileybury in England in 1806. The move reinforced metropolitan social formation before officers encountered India.

The 1833 equality clause did not open senior office effectively. Competition after 1853 attacked patronage, not racial inequality itself. An examination in London based heavily on British classical education presented formally common rules with highly unequal opportunity.

The army: instrument and fiscal engine of expansion

Before 1857, three presidency armies existed alongside Crown regiments stationed in India. The Company forces included European units and much larger “native” regiments recruited from Indian communities. European officers held commissions and

command; Indians could rise only within a restricted rank structure.

The army performed four functions:

- conquered and annexed territories;
- defended the Company against Indian and European rivals;
- suppressed rebellion and enforced revenue demands;
- projected British power beyond India at Indian fiscal cost.

Military organization depended on regular pay, standardized drill, artillery, logistics, and a unitary command. Yet it also depended on Indian soldiers' social worlds. Bengal regiments recruited heavily from high-caste peasants of Awadh and Bihar and accommodated caste practices in ways that produced corporate solidarity. Chennai and Mumbai armies had different recruitment profiles. There was no single homogeneous "se-poy."

Military expenditure absorbed a very large share of revenue, creating a cycle: conquest produced revenue; revenue maintained the army; the army enabled further conquest. The revolt of 1857 revealed that the army was also a politically vulnerable institution.

Police: from local obligations to a coercive district system

Mughal and regional arrangements had included *faujdars*, urban *kotwals*, zamindari retainers, and village watchmen. Company rule did not create policing from nothing. It reorganized and subordinated these practices.

During the 1770s Hastings experimented with *faujdar* stations and required zamindars to assist against robbery. Cornwallis in 1791 relieved zamindars of major police duties and placed *thanas* under Indian *darogas*, supervised through district authority. Bentinck abolished some separate superintendent posts and made the collector-magistrate responsible, with divisional commissioners supervising.

The system was thinly staffed, badly paid, and vulnerable to extortion and alliance with local powerholders. It protected revenue routes and political order more reliably than ordinary people. A province-wide civil constabulary under the Police Act belongs to the post-1857 reorganization, not this period.

Judiciary: overlapping jurisdictions before codification

Presidency-town justice. Mayor's Courts established in 1726 served the presidency towns. The Regulating Act added the royal Supreme Court at Kolkata in 1774, applying English legal assumptions in a setting where its reach was unclear.

Hastings's *adalat* plan, 1772. District Diwani Adalats handled civil and revenue disputes, initially under collectors. District Faujdari Adalats handled criminal cases through Indian officers, qazis, and muftis. Appeals went to the Sadar Diwani Adalat and Sadar Nizamat Adalat. Hindu law applied to Hindus and Muslim law to Muslims in specified personal matters, interpreted by pandits and Muslim jurists.

Cornwallis reforms, 1790–93. District judges replaced collectors in civil courts; provincial circuit courts heard appeals and serious criminal cases; the Sadar courts stood at the apex. The Cornwallis Code collected regulations, separated revenue and judicial functions, and made officials answerable in civil courts. Indians remained largely confined to lower judicial offices.

Bentinck reforms. Provincial circuit courts were abolished as costly and slow. Commissioners, collectors, and magistrates recovered functions. Indian *munsifs* and *sadramins* received wider civil jurisdiction. Courts at Allahabad improved access for the upper provinces.

Codification. The Charter Act of 1833 enabled the First Law Commission under Macaulay. Its Penal Code draft appeared in 1837 but became law only in 1860. Do not credit the Company state before 1857 with codes enacted afterward.

Rule of law: achievement and contradiction

Recorded regulations, appellate hierarchies, and official liability reduced some forms of arbitrary personal rule. Property and contract claims became more justiciable. But the system had structural limits:

- government was not responsible to Indians;
- Europeans retained legal and social privileges;
- senior judges often lacked command of languages and local practices;
- litigation was costly, slow, technical, and open to manipulation;
- executive officers combined powers at district level;
- codification translated fluid custom into rigid official categories;
- “equality” operated within a colonial order founded on conquest.

The colonial state was therefore both more bureaucratically regular and more penetrating. Regularity strengthened domination as well as legal predictability.

Interpretations and debates

P.J. Marshall emphasizes the initiative of officials in India before effective metropolitan control. The 1773 and 1784 acts show Parliament progressively converting that improvised authority into a supervised imperial system.

Eric Stokes distinguishes the Cornwallis regulative model from the paternalist tradition of Thomas Munro, Mountstuart Elphinstone, John Malcolm, and Charles Metcalfe. Both nevertheless asserted centralized sovereignty and denied Indians political participation.

Bernard Cohn stresses that classification, law, language, ceremony, and administrative knowledge helped construct colonial

authority. Surveys and codes did not merely describe India; they converted social practices into governable categories.

Nationalist analysis treats the administration as an apparatus for revenue, order, and economic subordination. That verdict remains persuasive, provided courts and procedures are not dismissed as unreal: they created durable institutions, but their benefits were limited by racial hierarchy and imperial purpose.

Balanced judgement: the Company state was neither a simple continuation of Mughal administration nor a neutral modern bureaucracy. It selectively retained Indian personnel and norms inside a centralized, fiscally military, racially exclusive order.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1765	Company receives Bengal <i>diwani</i>	Gives fiscal authority without an adequate governing apparatus.
1772	Hastings ends Dual Government	Company assumes direct revenue administration and reorganizes district courts.
1773	Regulating Act	First major parliamentary regulation; creates Governor-General of Bengal and council.
1774	Supreme Court opens at Kolkata	Introduces a royal court whose jurisdiction clashes with Company institutions.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1781	Act of Settlement	Restricts Supreme Court reach and clarifies relations with revenue and personal law.
1784	Pitt's India Act	Creates Board of Control and stronger metropolitan supervision.
1786	Amending Act	Strengthens Governor-General against the council.
1791–93	Cornwallis police and judicial reforms	Organizes <i>thanas</i> , separates revenue from civil justice, and codifies regulations.
1793	Charter Act and Cornwallis Code	Continues Company privileges and consolidates administrative rules.
1800	Fort William College founded	Wellesley seeks practical training for newly arrived civilians.
1806	East India College established at Haileybury	Moves official training to Britain under directorate control.
1813	Charter Act	Ends Company monopoly over Indian trade, while political rule continues.
1828–35	Bentinck's administrative reforms	Reduces costs, reshapes courts, and recombines some executive-judicial functions.
1833	Charter Act	Ends Company commerce, centralizes legislation, and creates a Law Commission mechanism.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1834	First Law Commission under Macaulay	Begins systematic codification; Penal Code draft follows in 1837.
1835–37	English expands at higher official levels and Persian loses court status	Reorients administration and employment while vernaculars gain ground in lower courts.
1853	Charter Act	Adds legislative members and ends patronage nomination as the sole route to covenanted service.
1854–55	Macaulay committee and first competitive civil-service examination	Defines an open examination held in London, still practically exclusionary for most Indians.
1857	Revolt challenges the Company state	Exposes military, political, and legitimacy failures; Crown transfer follows in 1858.

High-confusion comparisons

Organ	Location	Main function	What it did not mean
Board of Control	Britain	Political direction of Indian affairs	It did not appoint every official or run daily districts.
Court of Directors	Britain	Company management, patronage, dispatches	After 1784 it was not politically sovereign.

Organ	Location	Main function	What it did not mean
Governor-General-in-Council	India	Central executive, legislation, war, diplomacy	It was not responsible to an elected Indian legislature.
Presidency government	Bengal, Chennai, Mumbai	Regional administration and army	It did not retain equal autonomy after centralization.
Collector-magistrate	District	Revenue and changing police-magisterial duties	It was not consistently separated from judicial authority.
District/Sadar Adalats	Company territories	Civil and criminal court hierarchy	They were distinct from the Crown's Supreme Court.

Feature	Hastings	Cornwallis	Bentinck
District civil justice	Collector supervised Diwani Adalat	District judge separated from collector	Indian lower judges expanded; commissioners replace costly circuits.
Criminal justice	Indian officers under Company supervision	Circuit courts and Sadar Nizamat hierarchy	Functions redistributed to commissioners and magistrates.
Police	<i>Faujdar</i> and zamindari assistance	<i>Thanas</i> under <i>darogas</i> ; zamindars relieved	Collector-magistrate gains central responsibility.
Governing ideal	Adaptation and indirect control	Regulation, separation, Europeanized elite	Economy, centralization, and utilitarian reform.

Self-test

1. What three administrative problems followed the conquest of Bengal?
2. How did the Regulating Act of 1773 alter government in India?
3. What was “double government” under Pitt’s India Act?
4. How did the Charter Acts of 1813, 1833, and 1853 differ?
5. Why did the collector become the pivotal district officer?
6. What did Cornwallis change in the civil service?
7. Why did competitive recruitment remain exclusionary after 1853?
8. How were presidency armies organized before 1857?
9. What changed in policing under Cornwallis?
10. Distinguish the Supreme Court from the Sadar Adalats.
11. Why is it inaccurate to say the Indian Penal Code operated before 1857?
12. How can rule of law and colonial authoritarianism coexist?

Answer key

1. Britain needed to control the Company, India needed a central authority over presidencies, and districts needed machinery for revenue and order.
2. It created a Governor-General of Bengal with council, subordinated presidencies in major external matters, and authorized a Supreme Court at Kolkata.
3. The Board of Control directed political policy while the Court of Directors retained Company administration, patronage, and commercial functions.
4. The 1813 act ended the Indian trade monopoly; 1833 ended remaining commerce and centralized legislation; 1853 enlarged legislative work and introduced competition for senior service.
5. Land revenue required records, coercion, dispute resolution, and police, causing several local powers to converge in that office.
6. He raised salaries, restricted private profit, formalized promo-

tion and regulations, and reserved senior covenanted authority for Europeans.

7. The examination was held in London, required expensive travel and British classical preparation, and operated under restrictive practical conditions.
8. Bengal, Chennai, and Mumbai maintained separate armies composed largely of Indian sepoys under European commissioned officers, alongside Crown troops.
9. Zamindars lost major police duties, *thanas* came under Indian *darogas*, and district supervision became more centralized.
10. The Supreme Court was a royal English-law court at Kolkata; the Sadar Adalats headed the Company's civil and criminal court hierarchies.
11. Macaulay's commission drafted the code in 1837, but Parliament enacted the Indian Penal Code only in 1860.
12. Regular rules and courts can constrain some arbitrary acts while still serving an unrepresentative, racially privileged government founded on conquest.

Closing perspective

Parliamentary control grew because territorial power, Company finance, British politics, and imperial profit had become inseparable. Pitt's India Act created dual control in Britain, not dual administration in Bengal.

Revenue Settlements and Agrarian Change

The Company's 1765 *diwani* made agrarian revenue the fiscal base of territorial rule in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.

Warren Hastings's five-year revenue farming from 1772 auctioned collection rights to high bidders; instability and overbidding led to annual settlements from 1777.

Revenue was the operating capital of conquest

Precolonial states claimed a share of agrarian produce through many arrangements involving cultivators, zamindars, village bodies, revenue farmers, officials, and hereditary rights. Company rule did not invent land revenue or intermediaries. It altered the scale, legal form, cash demand, record system, and relationship between fiscal default and property loss.

The Company needed land revenue to:

- purchase Indian goods for export after political control reduced reliance on imported bullion;
- pay civil and military establishments;
- finance wars and territorial expansion;
- service debts, remittances, and payments linked to Britain;
- sustain police, courts, surveys, and record-keeping that extended state reach.

Officials wanted a stable annual figure, yet harvests fluctu-

ated. They wanted improvement, yet heavy assessment reduced investment. They wanted simple collection, yet rural rights were layered among cultivators, zamindars, village co-sharers, tenants, and service groups. The three principal systems were competing answers to these contradictions.

Revenue farming before Permanent Settlement

After 1765 the Company initially governed through Indian deputies. Direct intervention increased after 1772. Hastings auctioned the right to collect revenue for five years to those promising the highest payment. The term “farmer” here meant a revenue contractor, not necessarily a cultivator.

The system encouraged optimistic bidding and short-term extraction. Contractors had little assurance of renewal and tried to recover their bids quickly. Traditional zamindars could lose collection rights to merchants, officials, or speculators. Actual collections often failed to match bids. Annual settlements from 1777 reduced the commitment period but increased uncertainty.

The failures produced a debate. Philip Francis favored a permanent settlement. John Shore possessed detailed Bengal experience and supported settlement with zamindars but was cautious about immediate permanence. Cornwallis believed that recognized landlords with secure property would improve agriculture and form a stable social order.

Permanent Settlement: what was fixed and what was transformed

The decennial settlement of 1789–90 was declared permanent in 1793. Its core features were:

1. **Recognized payer:** zamindars became hereditary, transferable proprietors in relation to cultivators and the colonial state.

2. **Fixed state demand:** the amount payable by each estate was fixed permanently in money.
3. **Punctual payment:** arrears could trigger auction of the estate under strict sale rules.
4. **Revenue incentive:** increases in rental income above the fixed state demand accrued to the zamindar.
5. **Tenant subordination:** cultivators' customary rights were not adequately recorded or protected at the outset.

Permanence is often misunderstood. The state demand was fixed; tenant rents were not. If cultivation expanded or prices rose, zamindars could retain the increment but often found rent enhancement and subinfeudation easier than capital improvement.

The early demand was high. A conventional formulation describes the state as claiming ten-elevenths of the assessed rental, leaving one-eleventh to the zamindar. This was an assessment logic, not a timeless share of every cultivator's crop. Local rental relations and later collections did not fit a single percentage.

Why Cornwallis chose zamindars

Several motives reinforced one another:

- **Fiscal certainty:** a fixed demand simplified budgeting.
- **Administrative economy:** collection from a limited number of estates was cheaper than dealing directly with numerous cultivators.
- **Political alliance:** a landed class dependent on the settlement could support foreign rule.
- **Property theory:** British officials expected secure ownership to stimulate investment, borrowing, and improvement.
- **English analogy:** some treated zamindars as equivalents of English landlords, despite major differences in rights and obligations.

The settlement converted selected revenue claims into a more

exclusive proprietary title. It did not simply recognize an ancient, uniform ownership right.

Permanent Settlement outcomes

Strict payment and high assessment produced estate sales, especially in the early years. Old families lost estates; merchants, officials, and urban investors purchased them. Yet sale did not eliminate old elites everywhere, and new buyers often relied on existing managers and local powerholders.

Subinfeudation multiplied layers between zamindar and cultivator: *patnidars*, tenure holders, agents, and rent receivers acquired claims. Absentee landlordism increased in some districts, but not all zamindars were absentee or equally inactive. Commercial crops, soil, market access, and local politics shaped behavior.

The state sacrificed future increases in its nominal land-revenue demand, but it gained stable early income and a loyal class. When prices rose, the fixed assessment became less burdensome for solvent estates. Cultivators did not automatically benefit because rent could rise and eviction or coercion remained possible.

Permanent Settlement extended beyond its Bengal-Bihar core to Varanasi, parts of Orissa, and some northern districts of the Madras Presidency. It never covered all British India.

Ryotwari: direct assessment in theory

Officials in southern India argued that large Bengal-style zamindars were absent across much of the newly conquered territory. Alexander Read and Thomas Munro developed direct field assessment in the Baramahal and Ceded Districts. The *ryot*, meaning cultivator or assessed holder, dealt formally with the state.

Core features included:

- survey and measurement of individual fields;
- classification by soil, irrigation, crop potential, or estimated produce;
- a separate *patta* or account of the holding and demand;
- cultivator rights of occupancy or proprietorship conditional on revenue payment;
- freedom in theory to relinquish land;
- periodic reassessment rather than permanent fixation.

Munro presented Ryotwari as compatible with Indian practice and protective of cultivators from zamindars. It also maximized state access to agrarian surplus by removing a recognized land-lord between government and *ryot*.

Ryotwari was not simple peasant proprietorship

Direct settlement did not mean that every cultivator became an independent owner in the modern sense. Several limits mattered:

- assessment was often high and based on imperfect surveys or estimates;
- payment remained due despite harvest failure unless remission was granted;
- reassessment could capture gains from price, irrigation, or cultivation;
- village headmen, mirasidars, renters, officials, and dominant peasants mediated local access;
- poorer cultivators depended on creditors for cash at revenue time;
- land could be attached or lost when arrears accumulated.

Early Madras and Bombay practice differed. Read and Munro's experiments were modified repeatedly. Bombay surveys under Pringle faced defects; later work associated with Goldsmid and Wingate sought more systematic classification.

A single sentence about “Ryotwari rates” across southern and western India therefore overgeneralizes.

Mahalwari: settlement with a village estate

In the North-Western Provinces, officials encountered complex co-sharer and village claims. Holt Mackenzie’s Regulation VII of 1822 proposed detailed surveys and records of rights. The unit was the *mahal*, which could mean an entire village, a portion held by a body of co-sharers, or another revenue estate.

The principal features were:

- settlement with a village community, co-sharers, a zamindar, or estate representatives depending on local tenure;
- joint responsibility for the assessed revenue in many cases;
- collection through a *lambardar* or head representative;
- records of fields, shares, rents, and rights;
- periodic revision, commonly intended for a multi-decade term rather than perpetuity.

Robert Merttins Bird’s settlement from 1833 improved measurement and record preparation and reduced some unrealistically high earlier calculations. Mahalwari spread in the North-Western Provinces and influenced arrangements in parts of central India and Punjab, though Punjab’s later village settlements had their own institutional history.

Mahalwari did not preserve an untouched village republic

Colonial officials often imagined Indian villages as timeless corporate communities. Actual villages contained unequal castes, lineage shares, tenants, labourers, artisans, and contested commons. Recording “custom” could privilege the claimants most able to present themselves as proprietors.

Joint responsibility created mutual pressure but could strengthen dominant co-sharers or the *lambardar*. Periodic reassessment exposed the village estate to increases. Fragmentation, sale, mortgage, and litigation could alter shares. Mahalwari was therefore a colonial reconstruction of village rights, not simple preservation.

Comparison without false uniformity

The systems differed in the person or body recognized as the principal payer and in whether the state demand was permanent. They shared deeper features:

- quantified rights through surveys and written records;
- demanded cash on a timetable set by the state;
- made land interests more saleable, mortgageable, and attachable;
- treated default as a threat to fiscal security;
- expanded courts and litigation around rent, title, and debt;
- placed production risk heavily on cultivators;
- sought both revenue and political order.

But “all peasants became impoverished in the same way” is not a sufficient explanation. Some occupancy tenants strengthened claims through later law; some substantial peasants accumulated land; some zamindars invested; irrigated or commercial regions could respond differently from dry subsistence zones. Class, caste, gender, tenancy, crop, ecology, and market access shaped who gained or lost.

Debt, commercialization, and agrarian hierarchy

Revenue had to be paid in cash even when output was consumed locally. Cultivators sold produce or borrowed at harvest and revenue dates. Credit was not new, and moneylenders were not

external to every village. Colonial enforcement changed the stakes by making mortgages, decrees, and auctions more effective routes to land transfer.

Commercialization could raise income when prices and yields were favorable, but it also exposed households to price falls, crop failure, and creditor power. Indigo, cotton, opium, and other crops involved different contracts and regions. Land-revenue systems interacted with commercialization; they did not alone cause every shift to cash crops.

Women's agrarian rights were often obscured when officials recorded male household heads, zamindars, or co-sharers as proprietors. Customary access to commons, forests, pasture, water, and gleaning could be narrowed when land was surveyed and exclusive claims formalized.

Agricultural investment and stagnation

Officials expected secure property to produce improvement.

The incentive often failed because:

- assessments were high or revisable;
- zamindars could raise rent more cheaply than invest in drainage or irrigation;
- cultivators lacked secure surplus and affordable long-term credit;
- fragmentation and uncertain tenancy discouraged improvements;
- state expenditure prioritized armies, administration, and selected infrastructure;
- technological and ecological needs varied regionally.

The outcome was not universal immobility. Cultivation expanded in several regions, crops changed, and irrigation works existed. The stronger judgement is that colonial fiscal institutions did not reliably convert agrarian surplus into broad productivity growth or cultivator security.

Revenue policy and rural resistance

New demands and property rules contributed to rural unrest, but rarely acted alone. Displaced zamindars, tenants, tribal communities, religious leaders, and peasants reacted to combinations of revenue enhancement, rent, indebtedness, forest restriction, official corruption, market coercion, and loss of political authority. Revenue policy must therefore be linked to the region-specific uprisings studied elsewhere, not used as a universal one-cause formula.

Interpretations and debates

Ranajit Guha interprets Permanent Settlement as a “rule of property”: colonial officials tried to create a landed order through abstract property rights and a fixed fiscal contract. The theory promised improvement but misunderstood Bengal’s layered agrarian claims.

Eric Stokes contrasts Cornwallis’s regulative, landlord-centered model with Munro’s paternalist direct administration. Yet both expanded centralized sovereignty, survey, revenue authority, and official control while excluding cultivators from political decision-making.

Dharma Kumar’s work cautions against assuming that Ryotwari produced a society of equal peasant proprietors. Rural hierarchy, tenancy, mirasi claims, labour dependence, and creditor relations persisted beneath direct state assessment.

C.A. Bayly emphasizes collaboration between colonial institutions and Indian commercial and landed groups. Property transformation was negotiated through existing power networks, not imposed on an empty countryside.

Balanced judgement: the systems should be compared institutionally, but their effects must be explained regionally. The recognized payer mattered, yet enforcement, assessment level, ecology, credit, tenancy, and local hierarchy often mattered more than the label alone.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1765	Company obtains Bengal <i>diwani</i>	Agrarian revenue becomes the fiscal foundation of Company power.
1772	Hastings begins five-year revenue farming	Collection rights go to highest bidders under the quinquennial settlement.
1777	Annual settlements replace five-year farming	Reveals failure of speculative bidding to produce stable collections.
1789–90	Decennial settlement begins in Bengal	Cornwallis and John Shore seek a longer settlement with zamindars.
1793	Decennial arrangement made permanent	Creates Permanent Settlement in Bengal and Bihar.
1790s	Estate-sale rules enforced	Revenue default turns zamindari interests into auctionable property.
1792–99	Read and Munro experiment in the Baramahal	Establishes early field-based direct assessment associated with Ryotwari.
1801–07	Munro works in the Ceded Districts	Extends direct cultivator assessment in southern India.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1820	Munro becomes Governor of Madras	Ryotwari receives broader official support in the presidency.
1822	Holt Mackenzie's Regulation VII	Provides the conceptual-administrative basis for Mahalwari settlement.
1820s	Early Bombay Ryotwari surveys and assessments	Direct settlement expands westward but suffers from measurement and demand problems.
1833	Robert Merttins Bird begins revised north Indian settlement	Improves surveys and records in the North-Western Provinces.
1830s–40s	Revised Bombay survey system develops	Attempts more standardized soil classification and periodic assessment.
1850s	Revenue systems cover most Company territories in varied forms	No single system achieves security, investment, and fiscal extraction simultaneously.

High-confusion comparisons

Feature	Permanent Settlement	Ryotwari	Mahalwari
Main payer	Zamindar/estate proprietor	Individual assessed <i>ryot</i>	Village estate, co-sharers, or representative body
State-demand term	Fixed in perpetuity	Periodically revised	Periodically revised

Feature	Permanent Settlement	Ryotwari	Mahalwari
Principal regions	Bengal, Bihar, parts of Orissa, Varanasi and limited Madras districts	Much of Madras and Bombay Presidencies	North-Western Provinces and variants in central/northwestern India
Key names	Cornwallis, John Shore	Alexander Read, Thomas Munro	Holt Mackenzie, Robert Merttins Bird
Claimed incentive	Landlord improves and retains future increment	Cultivator improves own holding	Co-sharers improve village estate
Main vulnerability	Tenant rents not fixed; estate sale and subinfeudation	High/revisable assessment; official discretion and debt	Joint liability; dominant co-sharers and revised demand
Frequent exam trap	"All rents were permanent"	"No intermediaries existed"	"Every <i>mahal</i> was an equal village republic"

Term	Meaning	Do not confuse with
Revenue farmer	Contractor bidding to collect state demand	Agricultural cultivator.
Zamindar	Holder of varied pre-colonial claims, re-made as proprietor in Permanent areas	A uniform ancient English-style landlord.
<i>Ryot</i>	Cultivator or assessed landholder	Necessarily owner free from rent, debt, or intermediaries.
<i>Mahal</i>	Revenue estate, whole village, or share of a village	Always one physically unified village.
Permanence	State's nominal demand on zamindar fixed forever	Tenant rent fixed forever.

Self-test

1. Why was land revenue central to Company expansion?
2. Why did Hastings's quinquennial revenue farming fail?
3. What exactly was permanent under Permanent Settlement?
4. Why did Cornwallis recognize zamindars as proprietors?
5. How did strict default rules change Bengal's landed order?
6. What were the defining institutional features of Ryotwari?
7. Why is Ryotwari not equivalent to universal peasant proprietorship?
8. What was a *mahal*, and who commonly paid its revenue?
9. How did Bird modify the early Mahalwari project?
10. Identify three structural similarities across all three systems.
11. Why should land-revenue outcomes not be generalized across India?
12. How do Guha and Stokes help explain the ideological differences and common colonial core of the systems?

Answer key

1. It financed administration, armies, trade purchases, debt obligations, and further conquest, allowing Indian agrarian surplus to sustain Company power.
2. High bidders promised unrealistic sums, extracted rapidly, displaced established claimants, and still failed to provide stable realized revenue.
3. The state's money demand from the zamindar was fixed permanently; tenant rents, cultivation, prices, and zamindari ownership could change.
4. Officials sought predictable income, cheap collection, a loyal landed class, and an improvement incentive based on British property theory.
5. Arrears triggered auction, transferring estates to merchants, officials, and investors and encouraging subinfeudation and new rent-receiving layers.
6. The state assessed individual holdings through survey, treated the *ryot* as the principal payer, and revised demand periodically.

cally.

7. High assessment, official discretion, creditors, village elites, renters, tenancy, and default sales limited actual independence and security.
8. It was a revenue estate that might be a village or share; co-sharers were often jointly liable through a *lambardar* or representative.
9. From 1833 he improved survey, field records, and calculation in the North-Western Provinces while retaining periodic village-estate settlement.
10. All quantified rights, demanded cash, strengthened transfer and attachment for arrears, expanded records and courts, and shifted risk toward cultivators.
11. Assessment, ecology, crops, markets, caste, tenancy, credit, local intermediaries, and enforcement differed within and across named systems.
12. Guha exposes Permanent Settlement's abstract property project; Stokes contrasts Cornwallis regulation with Munro paternalism while showing both served centralized colonial sovereignty.

Closing perspective

Company land policy transformed existing rights; it did not enter a countryside without revenue institutions. The recognized payer distinguishes the three systems more clearly than a simple landlord-versus-peasant formula.

Trade, Industry, Drain, Poverty, and Famine

Company “investment” meant Indian goods purchased with Indian revenue and exported without a matching inflow of bullion.

The Charter Act of 1813 ended the Company’s monopoly over Indian trade and accelerated the entry of British manufactures.

Three overlapping stages of colonial exploitation

Rajani Palme Dutt’s Marxist periodisation is useful if treated as a model rather than rigid dates.

Merchant capital and monopoly, about 1757--1813

The Company sought monopoly in trade and direct command over revenue. Its servants accumulated private fortunes, while Company agents compelled producers to accept advances, deliver at fixed prices and avoid rival buyers. After 1765, Bengal revenue financed purchases of textiles and other goods for export. The goods left India, but the purchase money was collected inside India as tax. This was an early form of unrequited transfer.

The period did not yet feature a large flood of British factory goods. Indian textiles remained internationally competitive. The principal injury came through political extraction, monopolistic procurement and revenue appropriation.

Industrial/free-trade colonialism, about 1813--1860s

Britain's Industrial Revolution changed the relationship. Manufacturers wanted India as a market for machine-made goods and as a supplier of cotton, indigo and other raw materials. The 1813 settlement opened Indian trade to British private merchants. Indian goods faced high barriers in Britain while British goods entered India under low or declining duties.

The slogan of free trade concealed unequal political power. Britain had protected its own industries during their development; colonial India could not choose comparable protection. The Indian market was opened before local mechanised industry had capital, technology or state support sufficient to compete.

Finance capital and managed investment, from the 1860s

British capital moved into railways, plantations, mines, banks, shipping, jute and managing agencies. The colonial state guaranteed returns, awarded contracts, controlled procurement and protected property. Older forms did not vanish: trade dependence, land revenue and Home Charges continued.

Investment created infrastructure and production, but the key questions are distribution and linkage:

- Who bore the risk?
- Where were profits spent?
- Did demand stimulate Indian machinery, skills and supplier industries?
- Did the network serve domestic development or export corridors first?

Deindustrialization: mechanisms and evidence

Deindustrialization can mean a fall in artisan employment, a declining share of manufacturing, falling real incomes, loss of par-

ticular industries, or failure to move into modern industry. These are related but not identical.

Main mechanisms

1. **Company coercion before 1813:** advances, exclusive contracts and low procurement prices weakened weavers and merchants.
2. **Loss of political patronage:** conquest reduced courts, armies and aristocratic demand for luxury textiles, metalwork and specialised crafts.
3. **British mechanisation:** factory spinning and weaving sharply lowered costs and expanded output.
4. **Tariff asymmetry:** Indian textiles faced prohibitive British duties while British manufactures gained easier Indian entry.
5. **Railway penetration:** imported cloth reached inland markets faster and more cheaply.
6. **Credit and state bias:** European firms had better access to banks, shipping, contracts and official influence.
7. **Weak technological transition:** displaced labour was not absorbed by factory growth on a comparable scale.
8. **Demand and fashion change:** elite consumption shifted, while mass poverty constrained markets for many crafts.

What declined

Spinning was particularly vulnerable because machine-made yarn could undercut household spinning. Many weaving centres and luxury crafts contracted. Artisans moved partly or wholly into agriculture, increasing pressure on land. Towns tied to old courts or specialised production declined, although port cities and new industrial centres expanded.

Why the debate remains open

Morris D. Morris questioned a simple collapse thesis, noting weak occupational data and the adaptability of handicrafts.

Census categories cannot easily classify seasonal cultivator-artisans, and national averages conceal regional divergence.

Amiya Kumar Bagchi found sharp long-term declines in the industrial share of employment in parts of Gangetic Bihar, especially among spinners and weavers. This supports substantial regional deindustrialization.

Tirthankar Roy shows that surviving crafts reorganised: wage labour sometimes replaced family labour, producers specialised, long-distance markets expanded and productivity per worker could rise even as employment shares fell. Indian handlooms retained coarse-cloth and specialised markets and later used mill-spun yarn.

The balanced conclusion is:

- important crafts and regions suffered major employment loss;
- decline was neither simultaneous nor complete;
- adaptation improved productivity in surviving sectors;
- craft resilience did not amount to an industrial revolution;
- modern factory growth was too narrow and late to absorb labour released from older industries.

Commercialization of agriculture

Commercialization shifted cultivation toward sale in regional, national or international markets. Cotton, jute, indigo, opium, oilseeds, groundnut, sugarcane, tobacco, tea, coffee and wheat linked different regions to merchant and export networks.

Drivers

- land revenue and rent increasingly payable in cash;
- advances from merchants or planters;
- roads, railways, ports and telegraph information;
- international demand and price differences;
- state monopoly or encouragement, especially in opium and plantations;

- cultivator choice where expected returns exceeded food-crop returns.

Why ``forced" versus ``voluntary" is too simple

Indigo cultivation in Bengal involved strong planter coercion and restrictive advances. Plantation labour contracts could be enforced criminally. Opium production operated through state monopoly and advances.

Other cultivators responded actively to prices. Cotton acreage rose during the American Civil War; jute growers expanded production when prices promised gain. Yet choice occurred within debt, high cash obligations, insecure tenure and unequal bargaining. Richer peasants could take risks and store crops; small cultivators often sold immediately after harvest and bore price collapse.

Effects

- regional specialisation and larger commodity markets;
- monetisation and stronger merchant-credit networks;
- opportunity for some cultivators, traders and landlords;
- exposure to world price shocks;
- food-security risk where purchasing power failed or cash crops displaced subsistence margins;
- differentiation within the peasantry rather than uniform impoverishment.

The 1860s cotton boom illustrates the cycle. High wartime prices encouraged borrowing and expansion. When American cotton returned to world markets, prices fell, but debts remained. In the Deccan, this contributed to land transfer pressure and the riots of 1875.

Railways: development with colonial design

The guarantee system promised private British railway companies a fixed return, often around 5 per cent, underwritten by Indian revenues. Land was made available and equipment was imported from Britain. Early routes connected ports with raw-material zones, markets and military centres.

Colonial functions:

- move troops quickly;
- carry raw materials to ports;
- distribute imported manufactures inland;
- secure guaranteed returns for British investors;
- integrate administration and surveillance.

Transformative effects:

- lower transport time and cost;
- wider grain and commodity markets;
- migration, pilgrimage and political travel;
- new employment and urban nodes;
- later opportunities for Indian firms and national organisation.

Railways were therefore neither economically useless nor an uncomplicated gift. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's phrase "private enterprise at public risk" captures the guarantee structure. Their social and market effects exceeded their original imperial design, but weak domestic procurement reduced industrial multiplier effects.

Drain of wealth: mechanism before measurement

Drain meant a transfer abroad for which India received no equivalent current import, asset or domestically spent income. Its forms changed over time.

Main channels

- private fortunes and remittances of Company servants;
- revenue-financed export “investments” after Diwani;
- pensions, furlough allowances and salaries remitted abroad;
- interest on public debt held in Britain;
- guaranteed railway interest and payments for imported equipment;
- India Office costs, military stores and imperial charges in Britain;
- costs of wars or troops serving wider imperial strategy;
- profits and dividends repatriated by foreign firms;
- shipping, insurance and banking payments.

After 1858, many official transfers were grouped as **Home Charges**. Council Bills enabled a technical settlement: importers of Indian goods paid sterling in London; exporters in India received rupees from Indian revenues. India’s export surplus could thus settle obligations in Britain rather than bring bullion or goods back to India.

Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, M.G. Ranade and G.V. Joshi turned drain into a nationalist argument. Naoroji emphasised that the transfer removed “potential surplus” that might otherwise finance investment, employment and demand.

Why totals differ

- estimates use different years and categories;
- some count all foreign salaries and profits; others subtract services rendered;
- reliable national-income data are scarce for early periods;
- an export surplus is not automatically drain if it pays for an asset or service of equivalent benefit;
- the counterfactual return on money retained in India cannot be observed directly.

Avoid repeating one percentage as settled fact. A stronger answer identifies the channel, explains why the payment was unrequited or externally controlled, and evaluates its likely effect on

savings and demand.

Modern industry: real growth, shallow transformation

Modern factory industry did develop:

- cotton mills in Mumbai from the 1850s, later Ahmedabad, Sholapur and Kanpur;
- jute mills near Kolkata from 1855;
- coal mining in eastern India;
- tea in Assam and north Bengal, coffee in the south;
- iron and steel under TISCO from 1907–12;
- sugar, cement, paper, glass, chemicals and matches, especially after the First World War.

British managing agencies dominated jute, tea, coal and much external finance. Indian capital was stronger in western cotton textiles and later diversified. War disrupted imports, Swadeshi expanded demand, and selective tariff protection after the First World War helped domestic firms.

The pattern remained limited:

- few heavy and capital-goods industries;
- imported machinery and technical dependence;
- regional concentration around ports, coalfields and selected cities;
- low factory employment relative to population;
- harsh labour conditions and low wages;
- profits often repatriated in foreign-controlled sectors.

Rajat Ray's idea of an "imperial division of economic space" adds nuance. European capital preferred protected, high-return sectors; Indian merchants and bankers remained active in bazaars, credit, inland trade and riskier fields. Underdevelopment did not result from an absence of Indian entrepreneurship.

Poverty: outcome of interacting structures

The claim that colonial India was poor is less controversial than the exact trend in average income across every decade. Poverty persisted through:

- stagnant or slowly rising agricultural productivity;
- high dependence on land and inadequate non-farm employment;
- unequal rent, revenue and debt relations;
- weak spending on mass education, health, sanitation and irrigation;
- regressive salt and consumption taxes;
- limited industrial absorption;
- external transfer and foreign control of investment;
- recurrent price, harvest and disease shocks.

Some regions and periods grew, including canal colonies, commercial-crop zones and industrial cities. Growth did not guarantee broad welfare: distribution, tenure, wages and public investment determined who benefited. Per-capita reconstructions are sensitive to uncertain output and population data. Use long-run claims cautiously and rely on converging indicators such as real wages, food availability, mortality, literacy, life expectancy and occupational structure.

Famine: from harvest failure to entitlement collapse

Drought or crop disease could begin a crisis, but famine mortality required people to lose command over food. Amartya Sen's entitlement approach distinguishes aggregate availability from access. A labourer can starve while grain exists if wages lag behind prices; a cultivator can starve after crop loss, debt seizure or inability to sell assets at fair value.

Colonial conditions that intensified famine included:

- chronic low incomes and little household reserve;
- high or inflexible revenue and rent demands;
- grain price spikes and speculative holding;
- loss of work and collapsing wages;
- inadequate, delayed or punitive relief;
- laissez-faire reluctance to interfere with markets;
- transport used for export or redistribution without guaranteeing local purchasing power;
- disease in camps and weakened populations.

Famine Codes, commissions and railways improved some later responses, but implementation varied and fiscal restraint remained powerful.

Bengal, 1943

The famine occurred without a single all-India food collapse. Key factors included wartime inflation, loss of Burmese rice imports, cyclone and crop disease, military procurement, transport dislocation, “denial” policies in coastal Bengal, speculation and uneven distribution. Rural labourers, fishers, transport workers and small producers lost purchasing power. Major scholarly estimates commonly place excess deaths around 2.1–3 million, with malaria, disease and displacement contributing alongside starvation.

Interpretations and debates

- Nationalist economists treated poverty as man-made and colonial, replacing explanations based on climate, population character or civilisational incapacity.
- The Marxist three-stage model explains changes in dominant British interests, but monopoly, trade, revenue and finance overlapped across its boundaries.
- Deindustrialization is strongest when specified by region, craft and indicator. “All handicrafts vanished” is false; “colo-

nial conditions caused major industrial displacement without adequate factory absorption” is defensible.

- Commercialization could create profit and productivity for some cultivators while increasing vulnerability for others. Market participation is not identical to capitalist transformation or welfare.
- Drain is best demonstrated by institutional channels rather than an isolated grand total. The debate concerns scale, valuation and developmental counterfactual, not whether official overseas payments existed.
- Railways had genuine integrative effects, but their finance, route priorities, freight structure and procurement reveal colonial distribution of costs and gains.
- Famine analysis has moved from simple food shortage to entitlement, policy and disease. Availability still matters, but access determines which groups die.
- Regional growth under colonialism does not disprove structural subordination; structural critique must also explain why some places and sectors expanded.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1757	Company political ascendancy begins in Bengal	Private fortunes, tribute and coercive procurement intensify.
1765	Company receives Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa	Revenue can finance export purchases without bullion payment.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1769–70	Bengal famine	Revenue pressure, market failure and administrative breakdown deepen a harvest crisis.
1793	Permanent Settlement	Fixes Company demand on zamindars while expanding landlord property and tenant vulnerability.
1813	Charter Act ends Company's Indian trade monopoly	British private trade and manufactured imports expand.
1833	Company's remaining commercial functions end	Colonial administration becomes formally distinct from Company trade.
1853	First passenger railway opens between Mumbai and Thane	Beginning of a network linking ports, interiors and military centres.
1854–56	Bombay cotton mill established and begins production	Early modern Indian-owned factory enterprise.
1855	First jute mill at Rishra	Start of Bengal's export-oriented jute industry.
1859	Inland Emigration Act	Plantation labour mobility is coercively restricted.
1861–65	American Civil War cotton boom	Indian cotton prices and acreage rise sharply.
1866	Cotton collapse and Orissa famine	Reveals market volatility and severe relief failures.
1875	Deccan riots	Indebted cultivators attack moneylenders' debt records.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1876–78	Great Famine	Drought, high prices, weak entitlements and restrictive relief create mass mortality.
1880	First Famine Commission reports	Famine Codes and relief principles begin to be systematised.
1896–97	Widespread famine and plague crisis	Market integration does not ensure effective access to food.
1899–1900	Famine in western and central India	Recurrent vulnerability despite prior commissions and codes.
1901	Dadabhai Naoroji's <i>Poverty and Un-British Rule in India</i>	Drain theory receives its best-known systematic statement.
1907	Tata Iron and Steel Company incorporated	Indian entry into modern iron and steel.
1912	TISCO begins steel production	Heavy industry develops, though still in a narrow industrial structure.
1917	Cotton import duty rises during wartime	War disruption and partial protection assist Indian mills.
1920s	Tariff protection extends selectively	Indian manufacturing grows but remains regionally and sectorally uneven.
1929–33	Great Depression	Export prices fall, rural debt burdens rise and jute/cotton regions suffer.
1943	Bengal famine	Wartime inflation, procurement, distribution failure and entitlement collapse cause catastrophe.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1947	Colonial rule ends	India inherits low incomes, agrarian pressure and a shallow industrial base.

High-confusion comparisons

Concept	Core question	What it does not automatically mean	Best evidence
Deindustrialization	Did craft employment/output/share/price decline?	Total disappearance of handicrafts or some	Regional occupational data, prices, output, wages and product shifts.
Commercialization	Was production increasingly for market?	Prosperity or coercion in every case	Crop acreage, prices, credit, contracts and sale destinations.
Drain	Did purchasing power leave without equivalent return?	Every import payment or foreign investment	Home Charges, remittances, unrequited export surplus, interest and profits.
Poverty	Could households secure adequate consumption and resilience?	A uniform fall in every region and decade	Real wages, nutrition, mortality, income and asset security.
Famine	Why did people lose access to food?	Drought alone	Prices, wages, employment, stocks, distribution, relief and disease.

Colonial stage	Dominant British interest	Main mechanism	Approximate transition
Merchant capital	Monopoly and revenue	Coercive procurement, tribute, revenue-financed exports	1757–1813
Industrial/free trade	Market and raw materials	Manufactured imports, tariff asymmetry, export crops	1813–1860s
Finance capital	Investment and imperial services	Rail guarantees, plantations, managing agencies, Home Charges	From 1860s

Self-test

1. What distinguished merchant-capital colonialism from the free-trade phase?
2. How did revenue-financed “investment” transfer wealth after 1765?
3. List five mechanisms of deindustrialization.
4. Why does handloom survival not disprove deindustrialization?
5. Explain why commercialization was neither wholly forced nor wholly voluntary.
6. How did the American Civil War cotton cycle contribute to Deccan distress?
7. Name five channels of economic drain.
8. Why should one avoid a single definitive percentage for drain?
9. Give two colonial and two transformative effects of railways.
10. Why did modern industry fail to absorb displaced labour on a sufficient scale?
11. What is an entitlement failure in a famine?
12. Give a balanced explanation of the Bengal famine of 1943.

Answer key

1. Merchant capital emphasised monopoly, coercive procurement and direct revenue appropriation; free-trade colonialism emphasised India as a market for British manufactures and supplier of raw materials.
2. The Company collected Indian tax revenue, used it to purchase Indian goods, and exported those goods without sending an equivalent payment into India.
3. Company coercion, lost court demand, British mechanisation, tariff asymmetry, railway penetration, unequal credit/state support and weak factory absorption; any five.
4. Surviving handlooms changed products, used mill yarn and raised productivity, while spinning and many weaving regions still lost employment and manufacturing failed to expand proportionately.
5. Indigo and plantations involved coercion, but many cultivators also responded to prices; all choices were conditioned by cash taxes, debt, tenure and unequal bargaining.
6. Wartime scarcity raised cotton prices and borrowing; after American supply returned, prices collapsed while debts remained, intensifying creditor conflict and riots.
7. Private remittances, Home Charges, pensions, interest, guaranteed railway payments, repatriated profits, imperial military costs and revenue-financed exports; any five.
8. Categories, years, valuation of services and national-income estimates differ, and the return on capital retained in India is a counterfactual.
9. Colonial: troop movement and port–hinterland export corridors. Transformative: cheaper mobility/market integration and later opportunities for migration, firms and politics.
10. Factory growth was late, capital- and regionally concentrated, weak in heavy industries and too small relative to population and handicraft displacement.
11. A household loses the wages, crop, assets or exchange rights needed to command food even when food may remain in markets.

12. Wartime inflation, loss of Burmese rice, crop damage, procurement, transport and denial policies, speculation and unequal distribution destroyed entitlements; excess deaths are best expressed as an approximate 2.1–3 million range.

Closing perspective

Colonial economic change must be analysed as a sequence of overlapping systems, not one unchanging policy. Political control enabled economic asymmetry: taxes, tariffs, contracts and investment rules were not decided by an Indian electorate.

Education, Missionaries, Print, and the Public Sphere

Early colonial institutions such as the Calcutta Madrasa (1781), Asiatic Society (1784) and Benares Sanskrit College (1791) reflected Orientalist respect for classical Indian learning and administrative need.

The Charter Act of 1813 permitted a larger missionary presence and assigned one lakh rupees annually to education, but did not settle the language or curriculum dispute.

Why education became a colonial question

The Company initially avoided broad educational responsibility. It needed interpreters, legal specialists and officials, but feared the expense and social consequences of intervention. Three pressures made non-involvement impossible:

- administration required personnel trained in languages, law and record-keeping;
- missionaries demanded freedom to preach and educate;
- Indian individuals and associations founded schools and sought public support for new learning.

The resulting system was never guided by a single ideology. It combined administrative utility, cultural confidence, missionary

ambition, fiscal caution and Indian demand. The same institution could serve several purposes: a college might train clerks, spread scientific knowledge, enhance elite status and nurture critics of colonial rule.

Orientalism, Anglicism, Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism

The Orientalist phase

Early Orientalists argued that governance required knowledge of Indian civilisation and that education should support Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic learning. The Calcutta Madrasa, Benares Sanskrit College and Asiatic Society fitted this approach. Fort William College generated translations, grammars and prose works while training officials.

Orientalism was not simply cultural sympathy. Codifying Hindu and Muslim law enabled colonial courts to classify and administer society. European scholars often selected Brahmanical or textual traditions as authoritative, giving fixed form to practices that had been more diverse. Knowledge became an instrument of rule even when individual scholars admired Indian learning.

Evangelical and missionary pressure

Evangelicals treated Christianity and moral reform as inseparable from education. The Charter Act of 1813 opened greater space for missionaries. Mission schools taught literacy, translated religious works and promoted female education, but conversion was never merely incidental. This produced both collaboration and suspicion: Indian families might value English, science or literacy while resisting religious instruction.

Anglicist and Utilitarian ascendancy

Anglicists favoured English and European literature and science; Utilitarians favoured rational, codified administration and supposedly useful knowledge. Macaulay's 1835 Minute dismissed the value of state support for traditional higher learning and argued for educating a limited English-educated class that could mediate between rulers and the population. Bentinck's resolution directed funds towards English education.

This policy is often called the **downward filtration theory**: educate a small upper and middle stratum, then expect knowledge to diffuse downwards. In practice, filtration was weak. English education served urban groups who could bear its costs and compete for jobs; primary education remained chronically underfunded.

Missionaries, printing and vernacular transformation

The Serampore Baptists, especially William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, made the settlement near Calcutta a major centre of printing, translation and schooling. They produced grammars, dictionaries, religious translations and periodicals in several Indian languages. Serampore College, founded in 1818, combined theological and broader instruction.

Mission activity mattered beyond the number of converts. It helped:

- expand printing types and standardised prose in regional languages;
- develop school networks, including schools for girls and marginal groups;
- circulate inexpensive pamphlets, textbooks and periodicals;
- provoke Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and other intellectuals to defend, redefine or reform their own traditions.

Indian agency changed the result. Teachers, translators, printers, parents and reform associations selected parts of the

new curriculum and rejected others. Religious controversy encouraged public argument: competing groups cited scripture, history, reason and social utility before audiences larger than a court or congregation. This argumentative culture became one foundation of the public sphere.

From Macaulay to Wood: building a hierarchy

Macaulay's intervention settled the immediate Orientalist-Anglicist dispute over public funds at the higher level, but it did not create a full system. Wood's Despatch of 1854 established the institutional architecture:

- a department of public instruction in each province;
- vernacular-language primary schools;
- Anglo-vernacular secondary schools;
- affiliated colleges and universities in presidency towns;
- grants-in-aid for eligible private institutions;
- teacher training, vocational education and support for women's education;
- secular instruction in government-run institutions.

The hierarchy contained a tension. Vernaculars were recognised at primary level, but English retained prestige in higher education and employment. The 1844 preference for English-educated candidates intensified demand for credentials.

The universities founded in 1857 followed the model of the University of London. They conducted examinations, prescribed curricula and affiliated colleges. They did not initially function mainly as residential teaching and research universities. This encouraged standardisation and rapid affiliation but also promoted examination-centred learning.

Expansion without universal access

The Hunter Commission of 1882 examined primary and secondary education. It recommended that primary schooling serve ordinary life through regional languages and that district and municipal boards take greater responsibility. At the secondary level it distinguished a literary stream leading to university from a vocational stream. It also encouraged private initiative and female education.

These proposals expanded institutions but did not overcome the central constraints:

- local bodies received responsibility without resources proportionate to the need;
- fees, distance, household labour and social prejudice restricted enrolment;
- girls, lower castes, Adivasis and rural poor faced compounded barriers;
- English higher education attracted funds and political attention beyond its share of learners;
- curricula and examinations rewarded credentials more readily than practical or scientific capacity.

Curzon, universities and the politics of control

The Universities Commission under Thomas Raleigh reported in 1902. The Indian Universities Act of 1904:

- reorganised university senates and increased nominated membership;
- tightened inspection and affiliation of colleges;
- empowered government to alter university regulations;
- promoted teaching and research functions rather than examination alone;
- made grants available for improvement.

The measure joined concern for standards, libraries and re-

search to enlarged executive power over senates and colleges. Nationalists therefore read academic supervision as political surveillance.

Gokhale, Sadler, Hartog, Wardha and Sargent

Gopal Krishna Gokhale moved a resolution for compulsory primary education in 1910 and introduced a bill in 1911. His proposal was cautious: local authorities could introduce compulsion in selected areas, with safeguards and financial support. Its defeat showed that even limited mass education faced official concern over expenditure and elite resistance to taxation and social change.

The 1913 resolution accepted a greater governmental role and expansion of primary schooling but rejected immediate universal compulsion. Under the Government of India Act of 1919, education became a transferred provincial subject administered by Indian ministers under dyarchy. Political responsibility widened, but provincial finances remained weak.

The Sadler Commission, appointed in 1917 primarily for Calcutta University, considered the whole school-to-university transition. Its principal recommendations included:

- twelve years of schooling before university;
- an intermediate stage separated from the university degree;
- a three-year degree course;
- boards for secondary and intermediate education;
- teaching and residential universities;
- stronger teacher training, women's education and applied studies.

The Hartog Committee of 1929 reacted to rapid expansion accompanied by high dropout, repetition and weak learning. It recommended concentrating on retention and quality, a four-year primary course adapted to local conditions, better teacher training, selective secondary expansion and improved university stan-

dards. Its attention to “wastage and stagnation” identified real failures, but the quality-first emphasis could also justify delaying mass access.

The Wardha Scheme of 1937, elaborated by the Zakir Husain Committee, proposed free compulsory education through a productive craft, the mother tongue and integration of intellectual with manual work. It aimed at self-reliance and dignity of labour, not narrow vocational tracking. Financial viability, teacher preparation and fear that craft would displace academic learning limited implementation.

The Sargent Plan of 1944 envisaged pre-primary provision, universal free compulsory education for ages six to fourteen, junior and senior basic stages, academic and technical high schools, adult literacy, teacher training and a three-year degree. Its forty-year timetable exposed the gap between an ambitious institutional model and the state’s willingness to fund rapid universalisation.

The press as a political institution

Editors joined local grievances into provincial or all-India questions, scrutinised budgets and laws, and gave associations a durable public voice. Financially fragile papers reached beyond subscribers through collective reading.

English papers addressed officials and linked presidency elites; regional-language papers widened reach and embedded politics in local idiom. Translation, reprinting and mixed editorial networks carried arguments across languages.

From pre-censorship to registration

Wellesley’s regulations of 1799 required newspapers to submit material for pre-censorship during war with France. The restrictions were relaxed in 1818, but acting Governor-General John Adam’s 1823 rules required a licence for a press. Raja Rammo-

han Roy closed his Persian weekly *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* in protest and challenged the principle that criticism required executive permission.

Charles Metcalfe's Press Act of 1835 replaced prior licensing with a declaration identifying the printer and place of publication. Because it made publication easier while preserving accountability, Metcalfe gained a reputation as the liberator of the Indian press. The uprising of 1857 prompted another Licensing Act, illustrating the recurring sequence: political crisis produced exceptional control.

The Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867 established a durable regulatory framework. Printers and publishers had to make declarations, identify the press and deposit copies. Registration is not the same as censorship, but it made responsibility traceable and could support later prosecution.

Sedition and language discrimination

Section 124A, added to the Indian Penal Code in 1870, criminalised attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law. Its broad language enabled the prosecution of nationalist writers including Bal Gangadhar Tilak and later Mohandas Gandhi. Sedition shifted control from licensing a machine to criminalising political meaning.

The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was more openly discriminatory. It authorised magistrates to demand bonds from Indian-language publications suspected of promoting disaffection or hostility between communities and to forfeit presses or printed matter. English-language publications were exempt. The law sought to control criticism of Lytton's policies, including famine administration and the Afghan war, without alienating the Anglo-Indian press.

Editors evaded or confronted the measure. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* switched to English, while protest exposed the contradiction between proclaimed liberal government and language-based repression. Ripon's government repealed the Act in 1882.

The episode made press freedom itself a nationalist cause.

Swadeshi-era repression and emergency government

The anti-partition and Swadeshi movements brought militant journalism, boycott advocacy and revolutionary writing. The Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act of 1908 empowered magistrates to confiscate presses connected with incitement to violence. The Indian Press Act of 1910 allowed government to demand securities and forfeit them for broadly defined objectionable matter. The financial burden could silence a small paper even without conviction.

Wartime Defence of India provisions intensified control during the First World War. The 1908 and 1910 press acts were repealed in 1921 after sustained criticism, but liberalisation did not last. The Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act of 1931 revived deposits, forfeiture and seizure during civil disobedience. The Defence of India Rules of 1939 imposed wide censorship during the Second World War.

Cultural policy after 1857

Before 1857, officials sometimes presented reform and Western education as a civilising mission. After the uprising, the Crown proclaimed religious non-interference and sought alliances with princes, landlords and socially conservative elites. This did not end education or missionary work. It changed the balance: government became more cautious about social reform while remaining suspicious of the educated intelligentsia it had helped create.

English education promised advancement, but racial barriers restricted higher offices and social spaces. Educated Indians then judged imperial practice by its own claims of liberty, legality and representation.

How the colonial public sphere worked

The public sphere was the network through which people debated matters presented as public rather than private. Its infrastructure included:

- newspapers, journals, pamphlets and printed petitions;
- schools, colleges, literary societies and debating clubs;
- libraries, reading rooms and coffee houses;
- religious and social-reform associations;
- political organisations, public meetings and lecture tours;
- postal, rail and telegraph connections that accelerated circulation.

It was neither fully open nor purely urban. Literacy, money, caste, gender and police power shaped participation. Yet oral recirculation carried printed arguments beyond subscribers. Women entered through schools, journals, reform organisations and domestic reading, though public authority remained male-dominated. Lower-caste and religious-community presses created counter-publics that disputed elite claims to speak for everyone.

The public sphere linked reform to nationalism. Debates on sati, widow remarriage, caste, women's education, religious authority and vernacular language trained readers in petition, rebuttal and association. Later discussion of budgets, famine, representation and swadeshi used the same practices. There was no automatic progression from English education to nationalism; colonial institutions produced skills and networks that Indians redirected through political experience.

Interpretations and debates

Education: emancipation or cultural domination?

Both effects operated. English education privileged European categories, helped staff colonial administration and produced a small credential-seeking elite. It also opened access to modern

science, political economy, law and international ideas that Indian intellectuals used against racial and imperial hierarchy. Vernacular schools and print transformed regional cultures rather than simply replacing them. The strongest answer identifies appropriation: colonial institutions constrained the field, but Indian actors changed the uses and meanings of education.

Was Macaulay solely responsible for colonial education?

No. English education already had Indian patrons and missionary advocates; administrative demand and employment incentives strengthened it. Macaulay decisively articulated the Anglicist case, and Bentinck's government redirected official funding in 1835. Wood's Despatch, provincial departments, grants-in-aid, universities and later commissions shaped the actual system. Treat Macaulay as a policy turn, not the entire history.

Did missionaries modernise Indian society?

Mission schools, presses, translations and female education contributed to institutional change. Conversion and theological superiority were also central aims, and missionary writing could reproduce racial or civilisational hierarchy. Indian religious and social groups did not passively receive reform; they founded their own schools, presses and movements, sometimes learning organisational techniques while rejecting missionary authority.

Did a public sphere require mass literacy?

No. Limited literacy restricted direct participation, but collective reading and oral discussion multiplied the reach of print. Newspapers also furnished arguments for meetings, petitions and associations. The public sphere was unequal yet effective before literacy became widespread.

Was press policy a simple march towards freedom?

No. The pattern was cyclical. Liberal declaration and registration regimes alternated with licensing, securities, forfeiture, sedition and emergency censorship. The state distinguished criticism it could absorb from mobilisation it considered dangerous. Political context, language and the perceived connection between writing and action determined the degree of repression.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1780	Hicky’s <i>Bengal Gazette</i> begins publication	Opens newspaper journalism in India and immediately demonstrates the press’s capacity to criticise officials.
1781	Calcutta Madrasa founded	Trains personnel in Islamic law and Persian-Arabic learning for Company administration.
1784	Asiatic Society founded by William Jones	Makes Orientalist study of Indian languages, law and antiquity an organised scholarly enterprise.
1791	Benares Sanskrit College founded	Supports Sanskrit and Hindu law learning needed by the colonial courts.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1799	Wellesley introduces press censorship	Requires pre-publication scrutiny during wartime and establishes a security rationale for control.
1800	Fort William College founded	Trains Company officials and stimulates grammars, translations and prose in Indian languages.
1813	Charter Act	Permits missionary expansion and earmarks one lakh rupees annually for education.
1817	Hindu College founded at Calcutta	Becomes a centre of English education and the Young Bengal milieu.
1818	Pre-censorship relaxed; Serampore College founded	Marks limited press liberalisation and the institutional reach of Baptist missionaries.
1823	General Committee of Public Instruction formed; John Adam's licensing rules	Institutionalises the education debate while restricting uncensored publication.
1835	Macaulay's Minute, Bentinck's education resolution and Metcalfe's Press Act	English higher education gains priority while the press receives a registration-based, relatively liberal regime.
1837	Persian displaced as court language	English and regional languages gain official functions at different judicial levels, reshaping employment incentives.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1844	English-educated candidates preferred in government employment	Connects education directly to a narrow clerical labour market.
1849	Bethune School founded at Calcutta	A landmark in organised female education.
1854	Wood's Despatch	Provides the most comprehensive nineteenth-century blueprint for a graded educational system.
1857	Universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras; Licensing Act	Higher education expands while the uprising prompts renewed control of printing presses.
1867	Press and Registration of Books Act	Establishes continuing declaration, printer and publisher identification, and deposit requirements.
1870	Section 124A on sedition added to the Penal Code	Creates a durable criminal instrument against anti-government writing and speech.
1878	Vernacular Press Act	Gives magistrates exceptional powers against Indian-language publications without equivalent application to English papers.
1882	Vernacular Press Act repealed; Hunter Commission reports	Restores a more uniform press regime and redirects attention towards primary education and local responsibility.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1882–87	Universities founded at Punjab and Allahabad	Extends the affiliating university network beyond the three presidencies.
1902–04	Raleigh Commission and Indian Universities Act	Curzon's reforms increase supervision, standards and official influence over universities.
1908	Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act	Targets revolutionary advocacy during the Swadeshi-era political upsurge.
1910	Indian Press Act; Gokhale's elementary education resolution	Repression through securities and forfeiture coincides with a nationalist demand for compulsory schooling.
1911	Gokhale's Elementary Education Bill	A modest compulsory-education proposal fails, revealing fiscal and political resistance.
1913	Government education resolution	Accepts wider state responsibility but stops short of universal compulsory education.
1917–19	Sadler Commission	Recommends a twelve-year school course, intermediate stage and reorganisation of universities.
1919	Education transferred to provincial ministers under dyarchy	Enlarges Indian responsibility without adequate central resources.
1921	Repressive press acts of 1908 and 1910 repealed	A temporary liberal turn follows sustained public criticism.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1929	Hartog Committee reports	Prioritises quality, retention and reduction of wastage over rapid numerical expansion.
1931	Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act	Restores wide security and forfeiture powers during civil disobedience.
1937	Wardha Scheme and Zakir Husain Committee	Propose craft-centred, productive basic education in the mother tongue.
1939	Defence of India Rules	Impose extensive wartime controls over news and political publication.
1944	Sargent Plan	Projects universal free compulsory education for ages 6–14, but on a forty-year horizon.

High-confusion comparisons

Pair	Do not confuse	Fast distinction
Orientalism vs Anglicism	Both were colonial knowledge policies	Orientalism supported classical Indian languages and traditions; Anglicism prioritised English and European learning.
Macaulay, 1835 vs Wood, 1854	A language-curriculum turn vs a system blueprint	Macaulay argued priority; Wood designed departments, levels, aid and universities.

Pair	Do not confuse	Fast distinction
Downward filtration vs mass education	Elite diffusion as-sumption vs universal provision	Filtration funded a small upper layer; mass education re-quired schools, teach-ers and public finance across society.
Hunter vs Hartog	Primary expansion through local bodies vs quality and reten-tion	Hunter stressed re-sponsibility and dif-ferentiated school-ing; Hartog stressed wastage, stagnation and consolidation.
Wardha vs Sargent	Nationalist basic edu-cation vs late-colonial comprehensive plan-ning	Wardha centred craft and mother tongue; Sargent mapped age stages and univer-salisation over forty years.
Mission school vs government school	Private religious pur-pose vs official secu-lar claim	Mission schools could include Chris-tian instruction; state institutions formally avoided religious teaching.
Metcalf Act vs 1867 Act	Liberalisation vs con-tinuing registration	Metcalf ended li-censing; the 1867 law standardised identifi-cation and deposit.
Vernacular Press Act vs Indian Press Act	Language-specific discrimination vs all-India financial control	The 1878 law ex-empted English pub-lications; the 1910 law used securities and forfeiture more generally.
Registration vs cen-sorship	Traceability vs prior or punitive control	Registration identifies responsibility; cen-sorship blocks, alters or punishes content.

Pair	Do not confuse	Fast distinction
Sedition vs incitement	Disaffection against government vs urging a specific offence	Colonial sedition was broad enough to punish hostile political argument without a direct call to violence.
Newspaper circulation vs audience	Copies sold vs people reached	Read-aloud and reprinting meant one copy could reach many listeners.
Public sphere vs universal democracy	Debate network vs equal political participation	The public sphere widened argument but remained structured by literacy, property, caste, gender and coercion.

Self-test

1. Why did the Company support Orientalist institutions before 1800?
2. What did the Charter Act of 1813 change in education and missionary activity?
3. Distinguish Macaulay's 1835 intervention from Wood's Despatch of 1854.
4. What was downward filtration, and why did it fail as a mass-education strategy?
5. Give four contributions and two limitations of missionary activity.
6. Why were the 1857 universities described as examining and affiliating bodies?
7. Compare the educational priorities of the Hunter Commission and Hartog Committee.
8. Why did nationalists object to the Indian Universities Act of 1904 despite its academic reforms?
9. Arrange these press measures chronologically: Metcalfe Act, Vernacular Press Act, Adam's licensing rules, Indian Press Act.
10. How did Section 124A differ from press licensing?

11. Why did newspaper sales understate the political reach of print?
12. Explain the relationship among education, missionary controversy, the press and nationalism.

Answer key

1. They trained specialists in Islamic and Hindu law, supported language study and made Indian texts legible to colonial administration.
2. It earmarked one lakh rupees annually for education and opened wider legal space for missionaries, without settling language or curriculum.
3. Macaulay argued for funding English and European higher learning; Wood designed a graded system of departments, vernacular primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, aid and universities.
4. It assumed knowledge given to a small educated elite would diffuse downwards; weak finance, inequality and elite employment incentives prevented universal diffusion.
5. Printing, translation, vernacular prose, schools, female education or marginal-group access; limitations included conversion pressure and cultural hierarchy.
6. They prescribed curricula, held examinations and affiliated colleges, while doing relatively little direct residential teaching or research at first.
7. Hunter emphasised vernacular primary expansion through local bodies and literary-vocational secondary streams; Hartog prioritised retention, learning quality and reduced dropout over rapid expansion.
8. It increased executive nomination, inspection and regulatory power over universities during nationalist mobilisation, making academic supervision resemble political control.
9. Adam's licensing rules (1823), Metcalfe Act (1835), Vernacular Press Act (1878), Indian Press Act (1910).
10. Licensing controlled permission to operate a press; Section 124A criminalised the political meaning of published or spo-

ken words as disaffection.

11. Copies were shared, reprinted, translated and read aloud in libraries, shops, schools, trains and public gatherings.
12. Schools and missions expanded literacy, translation and controversy; newspapers and associations carried arguments into public debate; Indians redirected these networks towards reform, rights and organised nationalism.

Closing perspective

The point of Education, Missionaries, Print, and the Public Sphere is not a date list. It is an explanation of how institutions, interests, and political choices changed the field for what followed.

Reform in the Early Nineteenth Century

Reform grew from the interaction of **indigenous argument, colonial power, missionary activity, print and new educational institutions.**

Warren Hastings's Orientalism favoured governing through Sanskrit and Persian learning; Anglicists later advocated English and Western knowledge.

Why reform became urgent

The reform impulse arose from several connected pressures:

- **Colonial subordination:** Political defeat encouraged reflection on social weakness, but colonial claims of Indian inferiority also provoked cultural defence.
- **Missionary criticism:** Missionaries attacked idolatry, caste, sati and other practices, often presenting conversion as moral rescue. Indian thinkers could oppose both the criticized practice and missionary contempt.
- **New education and print:** English education introduced Enlightenment, liberal and utilitarian ideas to a small group; vernacular print widened debate beyond that circle.
- **Indigenous intellectual traditions:** Vedanta, Islamic monotheism, Bhakti, Sufi reasoning, customary practice and jurisprudential debate offered concepts through which change could be argued.

- **Changing social groups:** Professionals, teachers, clerks, merchants and small landed elites acquired new forums but also faced blocked employment and racial inequality.
- **Visible social injustice:** Widow immolation, child marriage, restrictions on widow remarriage, polygamy, caste exclusion and denial of education became contested public questions.

The phrase “Western impact” is therefore inadequate. Western ideas were selected, translated and disputed. Colonial officials disagreed among themselves; missionaries and utilitarians had different aims; Indian reformers did not simply imitate either. Reform became a struggle over who could define authentic religion, reason and public good.

Colonial policy: non-intervention, knowledge and intervention

The early Company usually avoided direct interference in religious practice. This was political pragmatism, not neutrality. Orientalist institutions such as the Calcutta Madrasa, Sanskrit College at Varanasi and Asiatic Society helped officials learn languages and legal traditions needed for rule. Colonial courts then translated diverse practices into more fixed categories of “Hindu law” and “Muhammadan law.”

After 1813, missionaries entered more openly and education became an explicit state responsibility. The Orientalist-Anglicist controversy concerned language, curriculum and the purpose of learning. Rammohun preferred modern science and knowledge through English but rejected contempt for Indian thought. Macaulay’s 1835 Minute, by contrast, treated European literature as categorically superior and proposed an intermediary English-educated class.

The colonial state intervened selectively. Officials could portray measures as proof of a civilizing mission while avoiding reforms that threatened property, revenue or political alliances. Indian campaigning provided knowledge, legitimacy and public

pressure, yet coercive state power determined law. This unequal partnership produced both change and suspicion.

Rammohun Roy: reason, scripture and public action

Rammohun Roy drew on Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and European learning. His monotheism was shaped by Vedanta, Islamic thought and rational criticism. He translated Upanishadic writings, argued against idolatry and priestly monopoly, and insisted that reason could judge every tradition. *Precepts of Jesus* praised Christian ethics while rejecting miracles and Trinitarian doctrine, angering missionaries who expected criticism of Hinduism to lead to conversion.

His method operated on three levels:

1. **internal authority:** scriptural interpretation showed that a contested practice was not essential to Hindu religion;
2. **universal reason:** human dignity and utility offered standards beyond inherited authority;
3. **public politics:** journals, petitions, associations and direct campaigning converted private belief into collective pressure.

He opposed sati, polygamy and women's subordination and supported women's inheritance. He also advocated modern education, freedom of the press, judicial equality, Indian access to higher office and protection of cultivators. Social, religious and political reform were connected: caste hierarchy weakened solidarity, and authoritarian government restricted moral improvement.

The Atmiya Sabha provided an early discussion circle. The Brahma Sabha, founded in 1828 and later known as Brahmo Samaj, institutionalized monotheistic worship without images and emphasized ethical religion. It was initially concentrated among educated upper-caste Bengalis. Its importance lay less in numbers than in creating a durable language and organization for public reform.

Sati: law, debate and women's position

Sati, or the immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre, was never uniform across India or all castes. It was concentrated in particular regions and status groups. Coercion, family property, widowhood, honour, religious merit and local authority shaped individual cases. Describing it simply as voluntary sacrifice or universal Hindu custom erases these conditions.

Rammohun's campaign from 1818 combined scriptural polemic, eyewitness intervention at cremation grounds, journalism and petitioning. Orthodox leaders associated with Radhakanta Deb and the Dharma Sabha defended custom and challenged the state's authority to intervene. Governor-General William Bentinck's government gathered administrative data and passed Bengal Regulation XVII in December 1829; related prohibitions followed in Madras and Bombay.

The measure mattered because it criminalized those who assisted the act. Yet a law cannot by itself reveal a widow's agency. Lata Mani argues that colonial and reformist debate often made scripture and the authenticity of tradition central while the widow herself remained the ground on which men argued. Women were variably coerced, constrained, persuaded, resistant or committed; treating all as either passive victims or free religious agents is equally reductive.

Young Bengal: intellectual radicalism and social distance

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio taught at Hindu College from 1826 to 1831. His students challenged inherited authority, supported liberty and rational inquiry, and publicly violated caste dining taboos. Derozians later campaigned on press freedom, jury trial, Indian employment and cultivator protection. The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, established by former students in 1838, sustained discussion of science and society.

Young Bengal's limitation was organizational and social.

Its radical performance centred on a small English-educated male group. It had weak links to peasants, artisans, women and vernacular publics and often confused social shock with durable transformation. Sumit Sarkar therefore judges its lasting religious and philosophical impact to have been limited. Even so, it expanded the permissible space of criticism and trained future journalists and association-builders.

Debendranath Tagore and Vidyasagar

Debendranath Tagore founded the Tattvabodhini Sabha in 1839 and joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1842-43. The *Tattvabodhini Patrika* promoted Bengali intellectual life and a rational study of India's past. Debendranath moved the movement away from close association with Christian Unitarianism and toward a reformed Vedantic identity. This broadened cultural legitimacy but could also moderate Rammohun's universalist radicalism.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar united Sanskrit mastery, rational argument and institutional action. As principal of Sanskrit College, he widened access beyond Brahmins and introduced Western subjects. He simplified Bengali prose and educational writing, promoted girls' schools and campaigned for widow remarriage. Like Rammohun, he cited Sanskrit texts strategically, not because scripture alone determined justice but because reform required legitimacy within a hostile public arena.

The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856 legalized remarriage and the legitimacy of children. It did not produce immediate mass change. A widow who remarried could lose claims in her deceased husband's property, social boycott remained powerful, and caste norms continued to regulate marriage. The campaign nevertheless transformed public argument and enabled those who chose remarriage to claim legal recognition.

Western India: caste, education and associational reform

Reform in Mumbai and Pune did not simply reproduce Bengal. Balshastri Jambhekar used the bilingual *Darpan* from 1832 to circulate scientific and social discussion. Gopal Hari Deshmukh, writing as Lokahitawadi in the 1840s, attacked caste privilege, priestly authority and social inequality. The Students' Literary and Scientific Society, founded in 1848, promoted lectures, vernacular knowledge and girls' education. Dadoba Pandurang and associates formed the secret Paramahansa Mandali in 1849 to reject caste restrictions and permit interdining.

Jyotirao Phule developed a more fundamental anti-caste critique. He located oppression not merely in corrupt custom but in Brahmanical control of knowledge and social power. Jyotirao and Savitribai opened a school for girls at Bhide Wada in 1848 and later schools for oppressed-caste children. Their programme shifted attention from reforming elite households to democratizing education.

Savitribai Phule trained as a teacher, taught despite harassment, became a head teacher, wrote poetry and organized educational work. Fatima Sheikh taught with the Phules and helped sustain the school within her family's premises. Sagunabai Kshirsagar also participated in early teaching. Their labour demonstrates women's agency at the point of implementation: institutions survived because women taught, recruited, managed hostility and created a new public role.

Parsi reformers Dadabhai Naoroji, Naoroji Furdunji and S. S. Bengalee helped establish the Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha in 1851. It sought religious purification, education and social change through debate within the Parsi community. The example confirms that nineteenth-century reform was neither exclusively Hindu nor confined to Bengal.

Women's education: state, missionary and indigenous initiatives

Missionaries opened some of the earliest girls' schools, including the Calcutta Female Juvenile Society in 1819. Such institutions expanded access but could also be associated with conversion, making families wary. Bethune School, founded in Kolkata in 1849, became an important non-missionary institution. Vidyasagar supported numerous girls' schools in Bengal; Jagannath Shankarsheth and Bhau Daji promoted female education in Mumbai; the Phule-Sheikh network built a pioneering indigenous, non-Brahmin initiative in Pune.

Women did not enter education only because male reformers “gave” it to them. Families negotiated risk, girls persisted against ridicule, teachers created curricula, and women used literacy for employment, authorship and organization. At the same time, much advocacy justified education by promising better wives and mothers. Education could modernize domesticity without challenging men's authority over property, sexuality or public decision-making.

Regional and social variation

Reform followed the geography of print, education, commerce, caste power and colonial institutions:

- **Bengal:** strong interaction among Orientalist scholarship, missionary print, Hindu College, Brahmo organization and an upper-caste *bhadralok* public.
- **Maharashtra and Mumbai:** vernacular journalism, Parsi associations, anti-caste critique and indigenous girls' schooling developed alongside elite reform.
- **Madras Presidency:** missionary education and debate existed, but a comparable early urban reform association had a smaller reach before 1857; later non-Brahman and religious movements followed distinct paths.

- **North India:** Delhi College, Urdu print and Islamic reform produced different intellectual publics; their history cannot be measured only against the Brahmo model.
- **Rural and Adivasi societies:** concerns centred more often on land, forest, missionary intrusion, customary authority and survival than on urban association agendas.

The terms reformist and revivalist are useful but porous. Brahmo, Prarthana and later Aligarh initiatives gave greater stated weight to reason and selective adaptation. Arya Samaj and Deoband later appealed more explicitly to a purified past. Yet every movement selected from tradition and responded to modern institutions.

Limits and contradictions

Early reform achieved real changes but remained bounded:

- Its organized base was mainly urban, educated, male and often upper caste.
- Scriptural validation could win legitimacy while leaving religious authority over social rights intact.
- The “women’s question” often made women symbols of community honour rather than autonomous political persons.
- Law was unevenly enforced and could not remove household coercion or economic dependency.
- Colonial sponsorship allowed officials to claim moral superiority and intensified fears of conversion.
- Reform of caste practice often stopped at dining and marriage among elites; Phule’s attack on structural caste power went further.
- English education created opportunity but excluded most people through cost, location, caste and gender.
- Public debate was regionally uneven, and the priorities of urban associations did not represent all communities.

Interpretations and debates

Awakening or colonial modernity?

Older nationalist narratives describe a renaissance led by heroic reformers. This captures intellectual creativity but may imply that society had been asleep. Postcolonial historians emphasize that colonial rule defined “modern” and “backward” and used education to create governable subjects. Gauri Viswanathan interprets English literary education as an instrument of moral and political discipline. Indian learners nevertheless appropriated that education to criticize both social hierarchy and colonial authority.

Who abolished sati?

An imperial narrative credits Bentinck and British humanitarianism; a nationalist narrative centres Rammohun. Neither is sufficient alone. Indian critics, orthodox defenders, widows’ kin, missionaries and officials all shaped the controversy, while only the colonial state possessed coercive legislative power. Lata Mani’s gender critique adds that male arguments over scripture often displaced the woman’s voice. The strongest answer separates campaigning, ideological framing, legislation and lived enforcement.

Did reform liberate women?

Legislation and education expanded possibilities, but reform often recast women as educated wives and moral mothers. Partha Chatterjee argues that nationalism later located cultural authenticity in a protected domestic domain, giving women symbolic importance without equal public power. Uma Chakravarti’s concept of Brahmanical patriarchy clarifies how caste reproduction depended on control of women’s marriage and sexuality. Savitribai Phule, Fatima Sheikh and girls who entered schools demonstrate agency that exceeds a male-reformer narrative.

Reform from within or imitation?

Rammohun, Vidyasagar and Phule used different intellectual strategies. Rammohun and Vidyasagar selected scriptural arguments while also appealing to reason; Phule attacked the authority structure that made Brahmanical scripture decisive. Their disagreement was indigenous and substantive. “Tradition versus West” cannot explain it.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1795 and 1804	Bengal regulations declared female infanticide illegal	Early state intervention targeted a practice associated with particular landed and elite groups.
c. 1803-04	Rammohun Roy composed <i>Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin</i>	Advanced monotheism and reason through Persian and Arabic intellectual traditions.
1813	Charter Act ended the formal exclusion of missionaries and allocated funds for learning	Intensified debates over education, conversion and the state’s social role.
1815	Atmiya Sabha established in Kolkata (Calcutta)	Created a circle for monotheistic and social discussion.
1817	Hindu College founded	Became a major centre of English education and later Young Bengal radicalism.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1818	Rammohun began sustained public agitation against sati	Combined scriptural argument, humanitarian reasoning, petitions and direct intervention.
1820	<i>Precepts of Jesus</i> published	Applied rational criticism to Christianity as well as Hindu practice.
1828	Brahma Sabha founded; William Bentinck became Governor-General	Organized monotheistic worship as state social intervention became more assertive.
1829-30	Sati prohibited in Company presidencies	Landmark law, achieved amid Indian campaigning, orthodox opposition and colonial debate.
1826-31	Henry Derozio taught at Hindu College	Inspired Young Bengal's rationalism, freedom of thought and attack on social orthodoxy.
1835	Macaulay's Minute and Bentinck's resolution favoured English education	Strengthened the institutional setting for a new, though socially restricted, intelligentsia.
1839	Tattvabodhini Sabha founded	Renewed the study and reformulation of Vedanta in Bengali public culture.
1843	Debendranath Tagore reorganized the Brahmo Samaj	Gave the movement a durable institutional base after Rammohun's death.
1848	Phules opened a girls' school at Bhide Wada; Students' Literary and Scientific Society active in Bombay	Linked women's education to indigenous initiative in western India.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1849	Bethune School and Paramahansa Mandal established	Different institutional routes to women's education and anti-caste social reform.
1850	Caste Disabilities Removal Act	Protected certain civil rights of people whose change of religion or caste status would otherwise cause forfeiture.
1851	Rahnumai Mazdayasan Sabha founded	Organized Parsi religious and social reform in Mumbai (Bombay).
1854	Wood's Despatch supported a wider educational structure, including female education	Gave state recognition to educational expansion while retaining hierarchy and limited funding.
1856	Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act	Legalized remarriage and legitimacy of children, but attached inheritance limitations and had limited immediate uptake.

High-confusion comparisons

Question	Simplistic answer	Better distinction
Reformist versus revivalist	Reformists were modern; revivalists rejected change	Both selected a purified past; they differed in the weight given to reason, scripture and institutional adaptation.

Question	Simplistic answer	Better distinction
Law versus social change	A prohibited practice disappeared when legislation passed	Law changed enforceable rights; custom, household power and economic dependence shaped actual uptake.
Women in reform	Women received uplift from male leaders	Women learned, taught, petitioned, resisted and organized; their agency varied by caste and class.
Rammohun versus Young Bengal	Both simply promoted Westernization	Rammohun sought an East-West synthesis and religious reform; Young Bengal made more demonstrative rationalist attacks on custom.
Vidyasagar versus Phule	Both used education in the same way	Vidyasagar reinterpreted Sanskrit authority and widened access; Phule directly attacked Brahmanical monopoly and centred oppressed castes.
Colonial state versus Indian reformers	One side caused reform	Indian argument created pressure and legitimacy; unequal state power legislated selectively and claimed moral authority.

Self-test

1. Why is “Western impact” an inadequate explanation for early nineteenth-century reform?
2. How did Orientalist policy differ from Anglicist policy?

3. What three methods did Rammohun Roy combine in his reform campaigns?
4. Why must the abolition of sati not be credited to a single actor?
5. What were Young Bengal's main contribution and limitation?
6. How did Debendranath Tagore alter the Brahmo movement?
7. Why was Vidyasagar's use of scripture strategic rather than simply conservative?
8. What did the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856 achieve and fail to achieve?
9. How did the Phule-Sheikh educational initiative differ from an elite "uplift" model?
10. Give two examples of regional variation in reform before 1857.
11. How does women's agency change the conventional reform narrative?
12. State a balanced judgement on the achievements and limits of early reform.

Answer key

1. Indian thinkers selected and contested Western ideas through indigenous religious, linguistic and social debates under unequal colonial power.
2. Orientalists funded Sanskrit, Persian and established learning for rule; Anglicists prioritized English and European knowledge to form an intermediary educated class.
3. Internal scriptural interpretation, universal reason and public action through print, association, petition and direct campaigning.
4. Indian reformers and orthodox opponents shaped the debate, women experienced varied constraints, and the colonial state alone possessed legislative coercion.
5. It normalized radical criticism and free inquiry but remained an English-educated male circle with weak links to wider society.
6. He revitalized it institutionally and grounded it more firmly in a reformed Vedantic identity through the Tattvabodhini Sabha.
7. He used recognized Sanskrit authority to make change legiti-

mate in a hostile arena while also relying on humanist reasoning and practical action.

8. It legalized remarriage and children's legitimacy but did not end boycott, dependency or caste control and could remove inheritance claims in the deceased husband's estate.
9. Savitribai and Fatima were teachers and organizers, while the programme connected girls' learning with a direct attack on caste monopoly over knowledge.
10. Bengal centred Brahmo, Hindu College and print institutions; western India combined Parsi association, vernacular journalism and anti-caste schooling. Other valid pairs earn credit.
11. Women appear as teachers, organizers, students and negotiators who built institutions, not merely as passive objects rescued by male reformers.
12. Reform created new organizations, legal rights, schools and public criticism, but remained limited by urban reach, caste privilege, patriarchy and selective colonial intervention.

Closing perspective

Early reform was an Indian debate conducted within unequal colonial conditions, not a gift from foreign rule. Orientalism and Anglicism were competing strategies of governance as well as educational philosophies.

Resistance before 1857

Civil rebellion here means resistance led by dispossessed rulers, chiefs, zamindars or former state personnel; it does not mean non-violent protest.

Adivasi is used for many indigenous communities historically classified by the colonial state as “tribes”; each had a distinct political and ecological history.

Classification is analytical, not absolute

One movement may fit several categories. Sanyasis and Fakirs were religious mendicants, armed bands and participants in an agrarian crisis. The Paikas were a militia with service lands, but peasants and regional elites joined them. Santhals defended an Adivasi homeland while attacking a combined structure of landlord, creditor and state power. Titu Mir’s followers used Islamic reform to organize cultivators.

The categories identify the **dominant mechanism**, not a pure identity:

Form	Typical leadership	Central grievance	Political horizon
Civil	Deposed ruler, chief, zamindar, former official or retainer	Loss of sovereignty, office, service land or revenue rights	Restoration of a dynasty, chiefdom or regional moral order

Form	Typical leadership	Central grievance	Political horizon
Adivasi	Community head, lineage chief, religious figure or insurgent organizer	Land alienation, forest restriction, outsiders and loss of autonomy	Recovery or defence of community territory and customary authority
Peasant	Cultivators, village headmen, local organizers	Revenue, rent, forced cultivation, debt and eviction	Reduction of exaction or restoration of customary subsistence rights
Religious/millennarian	Samyasi, fakir, guru, <i>pir</i> or prophetic figure	Moral disorder intertwined with economic and political grievance	Purified community, just rule or restoration of a sacred past
Military	Sepoys, hereditary militia or demobilized soldiers	Pay, allowances, overseas service, rank, dress and lost employment	Redress of service grievance or restoration of a former patron

“Local” does not mean insignificant, and “restorationist” does not mean apolitical. Rebels often sought to reconstruct a legitimate world they believed colonial rule had violated. Their concept of justice could be based on custom, kingly obligation, religious morality or community control rather than constitutional citizenship.

Common causes, different combinations

Conquest and dispossession

Company expansion displaced rulers and weakened the military households, paiks, polygars, gadkaris, village guards and retainers who depended on older states. Cash pensions rarely replaced land, status and reciprocal obligation. A refusal to

recognize adoption, a new succession arrangement or direct annexation could therefore mobilize a court and its dependants.

Revenue and property transformation

Permanent, Ryotwari and Mahalwari settlements differed, but each sought regular, monetized revenue. High assessment, inflexible collection and auction could dispossess landholders and cultivators. Colonial courts gave contracts and documented title new power, while those accustomed to shared or layered rights found their claims downgraded. Revenue farmers and landlords could use police, courts and armed agents to collect more than cultivators regarded as legitimate.

Credit, commercialization and outsiders

Cash revenue increased borrowing. Merchants and moneylenders entered regions where land could now be mortgaged or transferred. Adivasi terms such as *diku* or *sud* identified outsiders not merely by ethnicity but by their role in a new coercive order. Railway construction, roads, plantations and markets brought officials, contractors and police deeper into previously autonomous zones.

Cultural and religious insecurity

Missionary entry, legal intervention and changes in military dress could be interpreted as a coordinated plan to destroy caste or religion. Such fears were not irrational simply because a single conspiracy did not exist: colonial power had already altered law and custom and missionaries openly sought conversion. Rumour joined separate experiences into a credible moral threat.

Ecological intrusion

Before the formal forest laws of the later nineteenth century, road building, timber demand, revenue surveys and outsider

settlement already threatened shifting cultivation, grazing and access to forests. Resistance defended an ecological system as well as political independence.

Civil and restorationist rebellions

Sanyasi-Fakir resistance

After the Company's acquisition of Bengal's Diwani in 1765, revenue extraction, restrictions on movement and the Bengal famine of 1770 destabilized rural society. Armed Hindu sanyasis and Muslim fakirs travelled through Bengal and had long collected alms or maintained connections with local magnates. Company officials treated their mobility and armed followings as threats.

Leaders associated with the resistance included Majnu Shah, Musa Shah, Bhawani Pathak and Devi Chaudhurani. Participants included religious followers, displaced soldiers, cultivators and local landholders. They attacked Company factories, treasuries and revenue personnel over several decades. It was neither a single centralized war nor simply religious banditry.

Chuar resistance in Jungle Mahal

"Chuar" was a derogatory official label applied to several forest and cultivating groups in western Bengal. Revenue demands, auction of estates and loss of *paikan* service lands affected zamindars, village militia and cultivators. Rebellions occurred in several phases, especially 1766-72 and 1798-99, under figures including Durjan Singh. The alliance crossed elite and non-elite interests: dispossessed zamindars wanted estates restored, while paiks and cultivators defended livelihood and customary claims.

Polygar Wars

Polygars or *palaiyakkarars* were fortified chiefs in the Tamil region who collected revenue, maintained armed followers and exercised local authority. Company efforts to impose tribute, disarm forts and replace negotiated sovereignty produced conflict. Veerapandiya Kattabomman was executed in 1799; Oomathurai and the Marudhu brothers led the wider southern uprising of 1800-01. The rebels sought regional alliances, but superior Company coordination and the isolation of forts enabled suppression.

Paika Rebellion

The Paikas of Khurda in Odisha were hereditary militia who held rent-free service lands. Company conquest, resumption of these tenures, a new revenue system, salt regulation and dissatisfaction with currency and officials injured them and wider rural society. In 1817 Bakshi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar, whose estate had been lost, led Paikas, Kandha participants, peasants and local chiefs in attacks on police stations, offices and treasuries. The Raja of Khurda remained a symbol of legitimate authority.

The uprising spread rapidly but lacked a durable centralized command and was suppressed. It was a major regional anti-Company revolt; calling it the singular “first war of independence” replaces analysis with a competitive label.

Kittur and Ramosi resistance

When Kittur’s ruler died in 1824, the Company refused to recognize the adopted heir Shivalingappa and attempted to take control. Rani Chennamma led armed resistance and initially captured Company officers, but was defeated and imprisoned. Sangolli Rayanna continued guerrilla resistance until his capture and execution. This occurred before Dalhousie’s formal Doctrine of Lapse; it should not be described as an application of that later policy.

Ramosis had performed policing and military functions under Maratha authority. British conquest removed employment and status. Chittur Singh led resistance from 1822; Umaji Naik organized raids and an alternative claim to authority in the late 1820s until his capture in 1831. Official “dacoity” language concealed the political economy of demobilization.

Ahom resistance

The Company entered Assam during the First Anglo-Burmese War and did not fully restore the authority expected by Ahom elites. Gomdhar Konwar was proclaimed ruler in 1828, and later resistance involved Dhananjay Borgohain and others. The movement was elite-led and restorationist but drew strength from hostility to foreign occupation. Partial administrative concessions followed even as Company control expanded.

Adivasi resistance and territorial autonomy

Bhil and Koli resistance

British occupation of Khandesh in 1818 disrupted Bhil authority, subsistence and relations with plains society. Bhil bands resisted in 1817-19 and later phases; military repression was combined with conciliation and recruitment into special corps. Kolis in western India similarly resisted administrative penetration, loss of hereditary claims and disarmament, including major activity in 1829 and 1844-46.

Recruitment into colonial units was not simply successful “pacification.” It converted selected fighters into agents of a new order while leaving deeper land and authority questions unresolved.

Kol uprising

In Chotanagpur and Singhbhum, hereditary chiefs and cultivators faced land transfer to outsiders, higher rents, moneylending and a new court-police system. Petitions failed. In 1831-32 Ho, Munda, Oraon and related groups attacked the property and institutions associated with *sud* outsiders and briefly removed Company authority across a wide zone. Budhu Bhagat became a prominent leader.

The uprising sought to restore territorial and moral control, but participant communities and local aims were not identical. Company forces suppressed it through major military operations and later administrative rearrangement.

Khasi resistance

After acquiring Assam, the Company planned a road across Khasi hills to connect the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys. Tirot Sing, a Khasi *syiem*, initially negotiated but resisted when foreign troops and road construction threatened political control. Fighting from 1829 to 1833 used difficult terrain and dispersed warfare. Tirot Sing was captured after prolonged resistance. The issue was not isolation from all trade; it was who controlled passage, labour and sovereignty.

Khond resistance

Khond communities in the Odisha hills resisted from the late 1830s to the 1850s under leaders associated with Chakra Bisoi. Company annexation of neighbouring areas, attempts to impose taxation and officials, and intervention against *meriah* sacrifice all played roles. Humanitarian suppression of sacrifice became entangled with territorial expansion. A moral judgement on the ritual does not erase the political use of reform language to extend rule.

Santhal Hul

Santhals had been encouraged to clear and settle Damin-i-koh near the Rajmahal Hills. The resulting agrarian frontier brought zamindars, *mahajans*, traders, police, officials and railway contractors. Debt manipulation, land alienation, illegal exactions and official indifference created a “composite apparatus” of domination.

On 30 June 1855, a great assembly at Bhognadih under Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu declared rebellion; Chand, Bhairav, Phulo and Jhano are also remembered in Santhal resistance. Rebels warned opponents, mobilized villages and attacked moneylenders, landlords, police stations and communications. Low-caste non-Santhal cultivators sometimes joined. The army used overwhelming force, burning villages and killing many thousands.

The creation of Santhal Parganas as a separate administrative unit acknowledged distinctive conditions but did not restore full autonomy. The Hul was mass, territorial and political, yet its imagined freedom centred on Santhal land and a just moral order, not a fully articulated all-India programme.

Peasant and religious-millenarian resistance

Rangpur Dhing

In 1783 cultivators in Rangpur rebelled against severe exactions imposed through the revenue farmer Debi Singh and his agents. Peasants assembled, created leadership, collected contributions and attacked coercive establishments. The rebellion shows that early peasant action could be planned and public rather than spontaneous hunger violence.

Pagal Panthis

Karam Shah’s religious community combined Islamic, Hindu and local practices among marginalized cultivators of Mymensingh.

Under Tipu Shah, the movement from the 1820s resisted zamindari rent and asserted an egalitarian moral authority. It briefly created alternative control in parts of the region. Religious language gave solidarity to agrarian demands without making them reducible to theology.

Titu Mir and the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya milieu

Titu Mir, or Syed Mir Nisar Ali, organized poor Muslim cultivators and artisans in the Barasat region. His reform challenged syncretic practices and elite authority, while conflict with zamindars, indigo planters and the Company turned it into armed resistance. A tax imposed by a zamindar on beards became a symbol within a wider agrarian struggle. Titu Mir's bamboo fort at Narkelberia was destroyed by Company artillery in November 1831.

Faraizi movement

Haji Shariatullah founded an indigenous Islamic purification movement in eastern Bengal; Dudu Miyan developed it into a strong village network after 1839. The claim that land belonged to God challenged rent and tax legitimacy. Alternative adjudication and organization operated across Faridpur, Bakarganj, Dhaka, Pabna, Tippera, Jessore and Noakhali. Hindu landlords were frequent opponents because of local class structure, but Muslim landlords were also challenged. It was agrarian and religious, not a timeless Hindu-Muslim conflict.

Mappila outbreaks

In Malabar, British law elevated the *janmi* landlord's claim toward absolute ownership and reduced cultivating *kanamdars* and tenants to more insecure positions. Many landlords were high-caste Hindus and many tenants were Muslim Mappilas, so class, tenure and religion overlapped. Islamic leaders and mosques gave a moral idiom to resistance. Major outbreaks at

Manjeri in 1849, Kulathur in 1851 and Mattannur in 1852 targeted landlords and the officials who protected them.

K. N. Panikkar emphasizes the “twin exactions” of landlord and state. Religious martyrdom cannot be separated from tenancy and legal change, but agrarian grievance alone does not explain the form, target and emotional force of mobilization.

Military resistance before 1857

Bengal sepoy mutiny of 1764

Sections of the Bengal army mutinied during the wars surrounding Buxar over pay and command. Hector Munro restored discipline through exemplary executions, including blowing selected mutineers from guns. The episode established the Company’s willingness to use spectacular violence against its own Indian troops.

Vellore, 1806

New dress regulations prohibited caste marks and earrings and introduced a turban perceived as resembling Christian headgear. Sepoys interpreted the changes alongside missionary activity as a conversion threat. Relatives and former retainers of Tipu Sultan’s family, confined at Vellore, provided a dynastic focus. On 10 July sepoy soldiers seized the fort and killed European soldiers before troops from Arcot suppressed them within hours.

Vellore combined service regulation, religious fear and restorationist connection. It did not spread because communication, timing and external support were limited.

Barrackpore, 1824

The 47th Bengal Native Infantry was ordered to serve in the First Anglo-Burmese War. Sepoys objected to marching without adequate transport, losing allowances and possibly crossing the

sea in violation of caste rules. Negotiation failed, artillery fired on the regiment, and leaders were executed. The revolt shows how administrative economy and cultural insecurity reinforced each other.

Outcomes and limitations

Most uprisings were defeated because they faced superior logistics and artillery, remained territorially bounded, lacked sustained coordination and were vulnerable to negotiated defections. Their programmes often sought restoration rather than a new social order; chiefs and peasants could share an enemy while desiring different outcomes. Community solidarity enabled mobilization but could limit alliances across boundaries.

Defeat did not mean irrelevance. Resistance forced administrative change, special districts, selective concessions, military recruitment, policing reform and more detailed surveillance. It preserved memories of sovereignty and exposed how colonial rule worked through local landlords, creditors and officials. It also created repertoires of assembly, oath, boycott, alternative adjudication, attacks on records and symbolic restoration.

Later peasant movements differed in important ways. Indigo resistance of 1859-60, Pabna leagues in the 1870s and Decan riots of 1875 used legal rights, rent strikes, social boycott, journalism and limited economic demands more systematically. They were not automatically nationalist either, but operated in a changed public and legal arena.

Interpretations and debates

Lawlessness, primary resistance or politics?

Colonial officials commonly classified uprisings as crime, fanaticism or primitive disorder, separating violence from the policies that produced it. Eric Stokes used “primary resistance” for a traditional society’s early armed defiance of colonial intrusion.

D. N. Dhanagare called many peasant movements “pre-political” because they lacked durable organization and a modern programme.

Ranajit Guha rejects the denial of politics. Rebels identified enemies and allies, assembled publicly, levied contributions, attacked records and institutions, and imagined an alternative authority. Their politics differed from parliamentary or nationalist politics; difference is not absence.

Were these early nationalist movements?

Nationalist memory often treats each rebellion as a step toward 1947. This recognizes anti-Company hostility but risks teleology. Most participants defended a kingdom, community territory, moral economy, caste status, service right or religious order. They did not share one organization, ideology or all-India programme. C. A. Bayly’s idea of regional *patrias* is useful: attachment to homeland and legitimate rule could be patriotic without being identical to later nation-state nationalism.

Class or community?

Material grievance explains why cultivators rebelled, but mobilization often followed kinship, ethnicity, caste or religion. Guha emphasizes community as an organizing form of peasant consciousness; K. N. Panikkar shows in Malabar how class and religion overlapped. Where landlord and tenant boundaries matched religious identities, conflict could acquire communal form; where they did not, co-religionists could also be targeted. Analyse the actual social map instead of choosing class or religion in advance.

Did charismatic belief make resistance irrational?

Promises that bullets would turn to water or a golden age would return strengthened courage and unity. Colonial observers

treated such belief as proof of primitiveness. Millenarian language instead translated a loss of land, status and moral order into a shared future. It may have produced tactical miscalculation, but it also furnished legitimacy and collective discipline.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
c. 1763-1800	Sanyasi-Fakir resistance in Bengal	Connected post-conquest disruption, famine, revenue pressure and mobile religious networks.
1764	Bengal army sepoy mutiny suppressed by Hector Munro	Early warning that pay, discipline and service could turn Company soldiers against command.
1766-72 and 1798-99	Major phases of Chuar resistance	Dispossessed zamindars, paiks and forest communities resisted revenue intervention in Jungle Mahal.
1783	Rangpur Dhing	Peasants organized against the oppressive revenue farmer Debi Singh and his agents.
1793	Permanent Settlement introduced in Bengal	Revenue rigidity, auction and new landlord power reshaped later rural conflict.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1799 and 1800-01	Major Polygar Wars	Company disarmament and revenue control defeated fortified chiefs in Tamil country.
10 July 1806	Vellore uprising	Sepoys seized the fort before rapid suppression; uniform change became evidence of a conversion conspiracy.
1817	Paika Rebellion in Khurda	Former militia, peasants and local elites attacked Company institutions under Bakshi Jagabandhu.
1817-19	Major Bhil resistance in Khandesh	British occupation and outsider penetration disrupted local autonomy and subsistence.
1822-31	Ramosi resistance, including Umaji Naik's campaign	Former policing and military communities resisted lost service and authority in western India.
1824	Barrackpore mutiny; Kittur resistance	Military service grievances in Bengal and an adoption-succession dispute in Karnataka produced separate revolts.
1825-35	Pagal Panthi peasant resistance	Tipu Shah organized cultivators in Mysore against rent and zamindari coercion.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1828-33	Ahom resistance in Assam	British failure to restore promised authority after the Burmese war generated elite-led regional revolt.
1829-33	Khasi resistance under Tirot Sing	Road building and foreign military presence threatened Khasi political control.
1831	Titu Mir's uprising suppressed at Narkelberia	Islamic reform, agrarian oppression and resistance to planters, zamindars and government converged.
1831-32	Kol uprising in Chotanagpur and Singhbhum	Land transfer, outsider rule and new law provoked a rapid restorationist assault.
1837-56	Khond resistance associated with Chakra Bisoi	Annexation, taxation and intrusive intervention challenged hill autonomy in Odisha.
1830s-1850s	Faraizi mobilization under Haji Shariatullah and Dudu Miyan	Built village organization around religious purification and agrarian equality in eastern Bengal.
1836-54	Series of Mappila outbreaks in Malabar	Tenant-landlord conflict and religious leadership interacted under colonial land law.
1844-46	Gadkari and Koli resistance in western India	Former service groups and hill communities resisted dispossession and administrative penetration.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1855-56	Santhal Hul	Mass uprising against zamindars, moneylenders, police, officials and the order protecting them.

High-confusion comparisons

Before and after 1857 peasant patterns

Feature	Many pre-1857 uprisings	Indigo, Pabna and Deccan movements after 1857
Immediate target	State agents, zamindars, chiefs, outsiders and creditors often attacked together	Planter, landlord or moneylender targeted through a more specific grievance
Political language	Restoration, sacred justice, community autonomy, moral economy	Contract, occupancy right, legal rent, debt record and public opinion
Organization	Charismatic leader, clan/community assembly, armed band	League, rent strike, social boycott, litigation, press campaign
Territorial scale	Community homeland or former polity	District or agrarian zone, sometimes linked to urban associations
Relation to nationalism	Not one homogeneous nationalist stream	Still usually limited in aim, but closer interaction with intelligentsia and later nationalist politics

Movements often confused

Movement	Region	Main base	Distinctive trigger
Paika, 1817	Odisha	Hereditary militia, peasants, local elites	Resumed service lands and regional dispossession
Vellore, 1806	Tamil Nadu	Company sepoys	Dress regulation, religious fear and Mysore dynastic link
Kittur, 1824	Karnataka	Court, retainers and local fighters	Refusal to recognize an adopted heir, before Doctrine of Lapse
Kol, 1831-32	Chotanagpur-Singhbhum	Ho, Munda, Oraon and related communities	Outsider land transfer and new legal-administrative order
Santhal Hul, 1855-56	Damin-i-koh	Santhal cultivators with some non-Santhal allies	Linked coercion of creditor, landlord, police and state
Faraizi	Eastern Bengal	Muslim cultivators in village networks	Religious purification joined rent and tax challenge

Self-test

1. Why are the five categories of pre-1857 resistance overlapping rather than exclusive?
2. What combination of conditions sustained Sanyasi-Fakir resistance?
3. Why should civil rebellion not be confused with non-violent resistance?
4. What grievances drove the Paika Rebellion of 1817?
5. Why is it inaccurate to link Kittur directly to Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse?
6. Compare Vellore in 1806 with Barrackpore in 1824.

7. How did colonial property relations contribute to the Kol uprising?
8. What was the “composite apparatus” opposed by the Santhal Hul?
9. How did religion and agrarian conflict interact in the Faraizi or Mappila movements?
10. Distinguish many pre-1857 uprisings from the Indigo, Pabna and Deccan movements.
11. Compare the interpretations of Dhanagare and Ranajit Guha.
12. Give a balanced judgement on whether pre-1857 resistance was nationalist.

Answer key

1. Leadership, social base and grievance intersected: a militia could be peasant, an Adivasi revolt could attack creditors, and religious authority could organize agrarian action.
2. Company revenue expansion, famine and rural distress, restrictions on mobile religious groups, displaced fighters and local patronage networks.
3. It refers to revolts led by displaced civil-political authorities such as rulers, zamindars and retainers, many of which used armed force.
4. Resumption of service lands, loss of Khurda sovereignty, revenue and salt policies, currency grievances and the displacement of hereditary militia.
5. The Company rejected Kittur’s adopted heir in 1824, decades before Dalhousie formulated and systematically used that policy.
6. Vellore centred dress rules, conversion fear and a Mysore dynastic connection; Barrackpore centred Burma deployment, baggage, allowance and sea-crossing concerns. Both joined service grievance to religious distrust.
7. Land was transferred to outsiders, rents rose, credit expanded and courts-police protected new claims at the expense of customary authority.

8. Zamindars, moneylenders, traders, police, officials and the colonial order that enforced their linked coercion.
9. Religious leaders and institutions gave moral legitimacy and organization to tenants facing rent, tenure and state-backed landlord pressure.
10. Many earlier uprisings used armed restoration and community moral authority; later movements more often used contracts, courts, rent strikes, boycott, associations and press around limited demands.
11. Dhanagare considered them pre-political for lacking modern organization and programme; Guha identified political consciousness in public mobilization, chosen targets and alternative authority.
12. They opposed Company rule and could express regional patriotism, but they lacked one all-India organization, ideology or nation-state objective; they were multiple political resistances rather than a single nationalist movement.

Closing perspective

Resistance began with Company conquest and accompanied every major expansion of fiscal and territorial control. Civil rebellions defended lost authority and service rights; the label does not imply peaceful methods.

The Revolt of 1857

Long-term causes included annexation, revenue pressure, dis-possession of taluqdars and rulers, racial exclusion, religious-cultural fear, and sepoy grievances.

Awadh's annexation in 1856 was especially explosive because Bengal Army sepoys were closely connected to its peasant and taluqdar society.

Causes accumulated across state, countryside, army, and culture

No single grievance explains the revolt. The cartridge controversy activated a political environment already transformed by conquest.

Political annexation and displaced authority

The Doctrine of Lapse annexed Satara, Jhansi, Nagpur, and other states when the Company refused to recognize adopted heirs. Nana Sahib lost the pension associated with his adoptive father, the former Peshwa Baji Rao II. The Mughal dynasty was told that imperial titles and residence in the Red Fort would end after Bahadur Shah Zafar. Awadh was annexed in 1856 on grounds of misgovernment, despite its long alliance with the Company.

Annexation affected more than rulers. Courts, retainers, soldiers, artisans, religious beneficiaries, and service groups lost

patronage. A political decision therefore produced unemployment, status loss, and local economic disruption.

Agrarian and social grievances

Revenue settlements, rent demands, estate sales, and official courts altered rural hierarchy. In Awadh, the summary settlement after annexation weakened many taluqdars and dealt directly with village claimants. Taluqdars wanted estates restored; peasants resented revenue, rent, creditors, and intrusive officials. Their interests could conflict, yet both could oppose the new regime.

Rebels often destroyed account records, court papers, revenue registers, and moneylenders' bonds. This targeted the documentary machinery through which debt and state demand were enforced. Participation nevertheless varied: some landlords and merchants supported the British, protected property, or changed sides as military fortunes shifted.

Religious and cultural fears

Missionary activity, the abolition of sati, widow-remarriage legislation, Western education, and legal changes were read through a wider fear that government intended mass conversion and social homogenization. Reform measures did not directly cause revolt everywhere, and many Indian reformers supported them. The issue was distrust: an alien state with racial power could make even limited intervention appear part of a hidden plan.

Rumours about bone dust in flour, forced conversion, and cartridge grease moved rapidly through cantonments and bazaars. Chapatis and lotus flowers later acquired legendary importance, but evidence for a centrally coordinated signal system is weak.

Sepoy grievances

The Bengal Army's Indian soldiers faced lower pay and status than Europeans, limited promotion, racial insults, and changes

in allowances when service areas expanded. High-caste recruits feared loss of ritual status during overseas service. Annexation reduced *batta* or foreign-service allowances as former “foreign” territories became Company land.

The Bengal Army recruited heavily from Awadh and nearby districts. Sepoys were peasants in uniform, connected to village grievances through family, land, caste, and patronage. This explains why military and civil rebellion reinforced each other in the Gangetic heartland.

The cartridge was a catalyst

The Pattern 1853 Enfield rifle used a paper cartridge whose end had to be bitten. Rumours held that grease contained cow and pig fat, offending Hindu and Muslim religious practice. Officials tried substitutions and procedural changes, but mistrust made reassurance ineffective.

At Meerut, 85 troopers who refused cartridges were sentenced and publicly shackled on 9 May. Fellow soldiers revolted the next evening, released them, attacked officers and civilians, and marched to Delhi. Delay by British commanders allowed the movement to reach the old imperial capital.

Delhi: symbol without full centralization

Delhi rebels asked the aged Bahadur Shah Zafar to lead them. The Mughal name provided legitimacy that no cantonment commander possessed. Princes, courtiers, soldiers, artisans, and townspeople participated, but administration struggled with finance, supplies, discipline, and conflicting authority.

Bakht Khan, an artillery subedar from Bareilly, arrived in July and attempted to create a governing court and coordinated command. Court factions and sepoy regimental autonomy limited him. Delhi was besieged from the Ridge, with British forces drawing crucial reinforcements and soldiers from Punjab. Its fall in

September included mass killing, expulsion, and destruction. Bahadur Shah was tried and exiled to Rangoon; his sons were killed by William Hodson.

Regional coalitions and leaders

Kanpur

Nana Sahib assumed leadership with Azimullah Khan as adviser and Tantia Tope as military associate. The killing of British captives at Satichaura Ghat and Bibighar became central to British revenge propaganda. Responsibility and command remain debated, but the killings were real and were used to justify indiscriminate reprisals.

Awadh and Lucknow

Awadh saw the broadest civil participation. Begum Hazrat Mahal declared her son Birjis Qadr ruler and worked with taluqdars, soldiers, religious figures, and townspeople. Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah emerged as a mobile leader. The Residency siege drew attention, but rural forts and taluqdar resistance made Awadh a prolonged war rather than one urban episode.

Jhansi and central India

Rani Lakshmibai initially sought recognition of her adopted son's claim and faced a complex local situation after mutineers killed Europeans at Jhansi. British refusal and advancing armies moved her into open leadership. She allied with Tantia Tope, captured Gwalior with rebel forces, and died fighting near Kotahki-Serai in June 1858.

Bihar and Rohilkhand

Kunwar Singh, an elderly zamindar of Jagdishpur, led resistance in Bihar and conducted a mobile campaign despite limited

means. Khan Bahadur Khan established authority at Bareilly in Rohilkhand. These movements drew on local retainers, soldiers, agrarian networks, and anti-Company sentiment.

Geography explains both scale and limits

The core zone ran through the upper and middle Gangetic plain and central India: Delhi, western Uttar Pradesh, Awadh, Rohilkhand, Bundelkhand, parts of Bihar, and Gwalior. There were outbreaks elsewhere, but the revolt did not engulf the whole subcontinent.

Most of Punjab remained under British control. Sikh chiefs and soldiers, Punjabi Muslims, Pathans, Gurkhas, and forces of loyal princes were recruited for suppression. Hyderabad, Patiala, Kashmir, Gwalior's ruler, and many Rajput states supported or did not challenge the British, even when contingents rebelled. The Bombay and Madras armies largely remained loyal. Bengal proper had unrest but no comparable regional overthrow.

Non-participation had specific reasons: political rivalry with former Mughal or Maratha power, recent accommodation with the Company, elite interest, different army recruitment, distance from the Bengal cantonment network, and rapid British control. It cannot be explained as lack of patriotism alone.

Why the revolt failed militarily

- No unified command connected Delhi, Awadh, Kanpur, Jhansi, Bihar, and central India.
- Leaders pursued partly different restorative and local objectives.
- Rebel supply, finance, intelligence, and siege capacity were inconsistent.
- The British controlled the sea and received reinforcements after the Crimean War and from forces diverted from China.

- Telegraph and postal communications accelerated British coordination, though rebels cut lines in places.
- Punjab remained a recruitment and supply base.
- Many princes, landlords, merchants, and army units supported the British or waited.
- British artillery, organized command, and ability to concentrate forces proved decisive.

Failure was not evidence of passive resistance or negligible strength. The Company state nearly lost its north Indian centre and required extensive Indian military support to recover it.

Suppression and reprisals

Delhi fell in September 1857; Kanpur and Lucknow were retaken through repeated campaigns; central India was subdued during 1858; mobile resistance continued into 1859. British and loyalist forces used summary execution, village burning, property confiscation, and collective punishment. Rebels also killed combatants and civilians. A balanced account recognizes violence on all sides without equating the organized punitive power of the victorious state with every local act.

Consequences

Crown transfer: the Government of India Act 1858 abolished Company rule. A Secretary of State for India and council replaced the Board of Control and Court of Directors; the Governor-General also became Viceroy.

Princely policy: annexation through lapse ended, treaties were affirmed, and princes became conservative pillars of empire under paramountcy.

Army reorganization: the European proportion increased, artillery was largely reserved for Europeans, recruitment shifted toward communities classified as “martial,” and regiments were mixed to prevent solidarity.

Landlord policy: loyal taluqdars and landlords received stronger support, notably in Awadh, while confiscation and restoration rewarded allegiance.

Religious caution: the Crown promised non-interference in belief and equal protection, while reformist zeal diminished.

Racial hardening: separation and distrust deepened. Public commemoration glorified British survival and marginalized Indian memory.

National memory: later nationalists reclaimed 1857 as heroic anti-colonial resistance, even as they debated its social programme and geographical limits.

Social participation was dynamic, not fixed

Participation changed as armies approached and local balances shifted. A village might provision rebels under one authority and negotiate with British officers later. Merchants could finance a rebel administration while fearing attacks on property; taluqdars could mobilize tenants yet also restore rent claims; peasants could follow a landlord against the Company and then use disorder to challenge that landlord. Women participated as rulers, couriers, suppliers, defenders, and members of displaced households, although official records usually foreground elite commanders.

Hindu-Muslim cooperation was visible in proclamations, shared military action, defence of religious practice, and the Mughal symbol. Rebel leaders often promised to protect both faiths and portrayed the Company as their common danger. This cooperation was politically important, but it did not erase local conflict or create a modern secular programme. Religious idioms gave rebellion legitimacy because political communication operated through familiar moral worlds.

The rebels also attempted government. Delhi formed an administrative court; Awadh issued proclamations and collected revenue; regional leaders appointed officers, raised supplies,

and heard claims. These efforts disprove the idea of unstructured violence, yet wartime scarcity and competing command prevented stable coordination. Restorative language pointed backward to Mughal, Peshwa, taluqdar, or dynastic rights, while the effort to expel an alien corporate regime pointed toward a wider anti-colonial future.

Memory, archives, and caution

British narratives centered besieged Europeans and celebrated loyal soldiers, while minimizing punitive violence. Nationalist retellings later centered martyrdom and unity. Court records, proclamations, petitions, folk memories, Urdu and Hindi writing, and local histories reveal different experiences. Numbers of participants and victims remain uncertain, so precise totals require caution. The strongest reconstruction compares military dispatches with Indian testimony and reads official labels such as “rebel,” “loyal,” and “criminal” as political classifications.

Rumour moved through regimental lines, pilgrimage routes, markets, postal runners, religious establishments, and kinship connections. Proclamations appealed to honour, faith, livelihood, dynasty, and freedom from foreign authority rather than one standardized manifesto. Speed of transmission explains the rapid May-June spread, but communication did not produce a national headquarters. Each centre interpreted the crisis through its own political history. That combination of fast circulation and local translation is why the revolt could be broad without becoming organizationally unified.

Economic capacity shaped endurance. Rebel armies required grain, transport animals, cash, weapons, and skilled labour. Where leaders could tax or command established estates, resistance lasted longer; where supply failed, indiscipline and desertion increased. British recovery likewise depended on Indian bankers, contractors, transport workers, informants, and camp followers. A narrow battlefield narrative misses this logistical contest and the dependence of both sides on civilian

economies.

Interpretations and debates

Colonial writers called 1857 a “Sepoy Mutiny,” emphasizing military origin and loyalty elsewhere. The label identifies the initial institutional setting but understates civil rebellion and political overthrow in Awadh, Bundelkhand, Rohilkhand, and parts of Bihar.

V.D. Savarkar popularized “First War of Indian Independence,” emphasizing unity and anti-colonial purpose. The formulation restored Indian agency but projects a later nation-wide programme onto uneven regional coalitions.

R.C. Majumdar rejected both “first” and fully “national,” stressing limited geography and divergent motives. S.N. Sen accepted that a military rising developed into a wider struggle, while Eric Stokes emphasized regionally specific peasant structures and leadership.

Rudrangshu Mukherjee’s work on Awadh demonstrates that sepoy and agrarian rebellion cannot be separated there. Tapti Roy’s work on Bundelkhand likewise stresses local politics rather than a single all-India script.

Balanced judgement: 1857 was a polycentric anti-Company rebellion whose military, civil, restorative, agrarian, and embryonic national dimensions varied by region. No single label is adequate without qualification.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1856	Awadh annexed; General Service Enlistment Act passed	Joins agrarian-political dispossession to sepoy anxiety.
Jan–Feb 1857	Cartridge rumours spread; Berhampore regiment refuses drill	Shows military disaffection before open revolt.
29 Mar 1857	Mangal Pandey attacks officers at Barrackpore	Early violent signal; he is executed on 8 April.
24 Apr 1857	Troopers at Meerut refuse cartridges	Leads to court-martial and public humiliation.
10 May 1857	Meerut uprising	Sepoys free prisoners, kill Europeans, and march to Delhi.
11 May 1857	Delhi occupied by rebels	Bahadur Shah Zafar becomes symbolic head.
30 May–June 1857	Revolt spreads through Awadh, Rohilkhand, Kanpur, Jhansi and central India	Military rebellion merges with local civil insurgencies.
June 1857	Nana Sahib leads Kanpur rising; Lucknow Residency besieged	Creates major regional centres.
July 1857	Bakht Khan reaches Delhi	Attempts to organize rebel military-administrative authority.
20 Sep 1857	British recapture Delhi	Breaks the principal symbolic centre; Bahadur Shah is captured.
Mar 1858	Lucknow recaptured	Major Awadh city falls, though rural resistance continues.
Apr 1858	Kunwar Singh dies after Bihar campaign	Removes a major eastern leader.

Date	Event	Why it matters
June 1858	Rani Lakshmibai dies near Gwalior	Central Indian resistance loses its most prominent commander.
Apr 1859	Tantia Tope captured and executed	Marks the end of sustained mobile leadership.
1858–59	Crown transfer and formal pacification	Administrative reorganization follows military suppression.

High-confusion comparisons

Dimension	Military mutiny	Civil rebellion	National-war claim
Strongest evidence	Bengal Army outbreak, cantonment spread, sepoy command	Awadh taluqdars and peasants, towns, displaced courts	Shared enemy, Delhi symbol, Hindu-Muslim cooperation, later memory
Main limitation	Cannot explain wide non-military participation	Coalitions and objectives differed by locality	Participation was geographically limited and programme not unified
Best use	Explains origin	Explains social expansion	Explains anti-colonial direction and historical significance

Self-test

1. Why was Awadh central to both military and civil rebellion?
2. Distinguish long-term causes from the immediate catalyst.
3. What occurred at Meerut on 9–10 May 1857?
4. Why was Bahadur Shah Zafar important despite limited operational power?

5. Name four major regional leaders and their centres.
6. What social coalition sustained rebellion in Awadh?
7. Why did most of Punjab remain strategically important to the British?
8. Give four reasons the revolt failed militarily.
9. Why is “Sepoy Mutiny” insufficient?
10. Why is an unqualified “First War of Independence” also insufficient?
11. List four major consequences of the revolt.
12. What is the most balanced characterization of 1857?

Answer key

1. Bengal Army recruits came heavily from Awadh, while annexation disrupted its court, taluqdars, peasants, retainers, and local economy.
2. Annexation, revenue, dispossession, racism, cultural fear, and service grievances accumulated; greased-cartridge distrust triggered open refusal and revolt.
3. Imprisoned troopers were publicly shackled on 9 May; fellow soldiers revolted on 10 May, freed them, attacked Europeans, and marched to Delhi.
4. The Mughal name offered common legitimacy and turned a cantonment rising into a political challenge to Company sovereignty.
5. Nana Sahib at Kanpur, Begum Hazrat Mahal at Lucknow, Lakshmibai at Jhansi-Gwalior, and Kunwar Singh at Jagdishpur are valid examples.
6. Taluqdars, peasants, sepoys, court groups, religious leaders, townspeople, and retainers cooperated despite differing goals.
7. Punjab provided troops, transport, supplies, and a secure rear for the siege and recapture of Delhi.
8. Valid reasons include fragmented command, divergent aims, weak logistics, British sea control, telegraph, Punjab manpower, reinforcements, and loyal princes.

9. It ignores large-scale civilian, agrarian, elite, urban, and regional participation after the army rising began.
10. The revolt lacked all-India reach, unified command, and a common modern national programme, though it had clear anti-Company direction.
11. Crown transfer, army reorganization, strengthened princely and landlord alliances, religious caution, racial hardening, and nationalist memory are valid.
12. A sepoy-initiated, polycentric anti-Company rebellion combining military mutiny, civil war, restoration, agrarian protest, and proto-national potential.

Closing perspective

The cartridge controversy was a catalyst operating on accumulated political, agrarian, military, and cultural grievances. Awadh linked sepoy discontent to a broad rural rebellion more strongly than any other region.

Part III

Crown rule and the rise of nationalism

Crown Rule and Imperial Ideology

The Government of India Act 1858 abolished Company government, the Board of Control, and the Court of Directors.

A cabinet-level Secretary of State for India, advised by a Council of India, exercised metropolitan authority and controlled Indian revenues from London.

Crown transfer changed the apex, not the district foundation

The 1858 act ended the anomalous rule of a chartered corporation. The Secretary of State for India inherited powers previously divided between the Board of Control and Court of Directors. A fifteen-member Council of India offered experience and advice; many early members had Company backgrounds. The Secretary could act through secret dispatches and spent Indian revenue through the London establishment.

In India, the Governor-General-in-Council continued. The title Viceroy emphasized representation of the monarch, especially toward princely states; Governor-General described statutory executive authority. Communications by telegraph and steam shortened London's response time and increased metropolitan direction.

Continuity mattered. District collectors, courts, revenue systems, police practices, and much of the civil service survived.

Crown rule was administrative consolidation after revolt, not a new state built from zero.

Proclamation: reassurance with boundaries

The proclamation promised respect for princely treaties, non-interference in religious belief, impartial protection of law, and admission to office based on education and ability. It repudiated aggressive annexation in tone and offered clemency with exceptions.

These promises had limits. Parliament remained sovereign, Indians had no responsible central government, senior offices stayed disproportionately European, and public policy could still affect religious and social practice. The proclamation was both a conciliatory settlement and a claim that imperial rule now possessed moral legitimacy.

Central executive and legislative councils

The Indian Councils Act 1861 enlarged the Viceroy's council for legislation with nominated additional members, including a few Indian princes and elites. These members could discuss bills when summoned but did not control the executive. The Viceroy could issue ordinances in emergencies and override debate.

Portfolio allocation gave executive council members charge of departments such as finance, home, military, and law. This improved specialization but did not create cabinet responsibility. The 1892 act enlarged councils, allowed limited budget discussion and questions, and accepted members recommended through indirect institutional channels. It stopped short of explicit election and gave councils no power to dismiss government.

Provincial administration and financial decentralization

The 1861 act restored legislative authority to Mumbai and Chennai and allowed new provincial councils. Later provinces and lieutenant-governorships developed councils. Central control over revenue, army, foreign affairs, tariffs, and major policy remained strong.

Mayo's arrangements assigned selected services, such as police, jails, education, medical services, and roads, to provincial budgets with fixed grants. Ripon developed divided and provincial heads of revenue. Decentralization encouraged budgeting and local adaptation, but it also shifted the burden of underfunded services downward while the centre retained elastic revenues and strategic priorities.

Local government: participation without sovereignty

Municipal bodies existed before 1857, often to finance sanitation, roads, and policing through local taxation. Mayo emphasized fiscal relief. Ripon's resolution of 1882 gave local government a more political rationale: non-official majorities, election where feasible, and non-official chairmen.

Actual autonomy varied. District magistrates supervised boards; provincial governments could suspend decisions; franchises were narrow; rural bodies had weak income; official members remained influential; and unpopular taxation damaged legitimacy. Yet municipalities and district boards gave lawyers, merchants, landlords, and professionals experience in budgets, debate, and representation. They became both administrative auxiliaries and schools of public politics.

Civil services: formal competition, practical exclusion

The covenanted service evolved into the Indian Civil Service. Competitive examination replaced nomination, but it was held in London in English and emphasized classical education. The maximum age was progressively lowered, making participation harder for Indian graduates. Satyendranath Tagore became the first Indian to enter through competition in 1863.

The Statutory Civil Service experiment under Lytton reserved some posts for nominated Indians but failed. The Aitchison Commission recommended Imperial, Provincial, and Subordinate classifications and a larger provincial career structure. Indians entered lower and provincial services in greater numbers, while key executive posts remained concentrated in the ICS.

The bureaucracy's claim to political neutrality obscured its imperial role. Collectors controlled revenue, magistracy, policing, famine administration, and political intelligence. Indian officials could exercise real administrative authority, but they implemented policy determined under alien sovereignty.

Army reorganization after the revolt

The Crown absorbed Company forces. Reorganization pursued prevention, external defence, and imperial deployment.

1. **European ratio:** policy maintained a substantially higher European proportion than before 1857, with regional ratios varying.
2. **Artillery:** field artillery remained overwhelmingly European; limited mountain batteries were exceptions.
3. **Recruitment:** Bengal high-caste recruitment declined; Sikhs, Gurkhas, Punjabi Muslims, Pathans, Dogras, and others classified as "martial races" gained preference.
4. **Counterpoise:** regiments and brigades mixed groups so no single community could dominate.

5. **Command:** commissioned ranks and strategic branches stayed under European control for decades.
6. **Isolation:** officials tried to separate soldiers from nationalist print and civilian politics.

“Martial race” theory was political ethnography, not military science. It rewarded groups associated with loyalism, essentialized communities, and transformed colonial assumptions into recruitment policy.

Indian taxpayers bore the cost of forces used for frontier wars and campaigns in Asia and Africa. The army was therefore both occupation force and imperial expeditionary instrument.

Police and judiciary

The Police Act 1861 organized provincial constabularies under an inspector-general, with district superintendents and subordinate stations. Village watchmen often remained. Low pay, coercive investigation, corruption, and responsibility to executive magistrates weakened public trust. Police suppressed crime but also watched meetings, print, labour, peasants, and nationalists.

The High Courts Act 1861 merged the royal Supreme Courts and Company Sadar Adalats at Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai. Codified criminal and civil procedure expanded. Equality remained qualified: European defendants preserved practical privilege, costs limited access, and executive magistracy was powerful.

The Ilbert Bill of 1883 proposed allowing qualified Indian district magistrates and sessions judges to try European British subjects. European agitation forced a compromise involving jury arrangements. The controversy exposed the racial boundary beneath claims of legal equality.

Racial ideology and social distance

After 1857, many British officials interpreted revolt as proof that racial separation and firmness were necessary. Clubs, cantonments, residential segregation, service exclusion, railway compartments, and everyday insult marked social distance. Scientific racism and “martial race” classification gave hierarchy an apparently modern vocabulary.

Lytton’s Vernacular Press Act targeted Indian-language publications while the Arms Act imposed licensing that operated unequally. The Delhi Assemblage of 1877 staged princes and subjects in a ranked imperial order even as famine afflicted parts of India. Curzon later defended bureaucratic authority and imperial ceremony against representative claims.

Racial ideology was never uncontested. Missionaries, liberals, Indian officials, and some governors differed over policy, and law retained universal language. The recurring retreat from equality, however, showed which interest prevailed when European privilege felt threatened.

Princely states: protection under paramountcy

After 1858, adoption rights were recognized and annexation by lapse ended. Princes who had remained loyal were rewarded. The Raj treated princely India as a conservative barrier against rebellion and nationalism.

Protection did not restore sovereignty. Princes could not conduct independent foreign relations, employ foreign Europeans without permission, or wage war. Residents and political agents monitored succession, administration, railways, communications, and strategic affairs. The Crown claimed a paramount authority above written treaty terms and could depose rulers for alleged misgovernment while preserving the state.

The Imperial Assemblage placed princes within a hierarchy headed by the monarch and Viceroy. Princely states retained

internal diversity: Mysore, Baroda, Travancore, and others pursued selected administrative and educational reforms, while other courts remained fiscally or politically restrictive. Indirect rule was flexible and intervention varied.

Landlords and conservative alliance

British policy after revolt strengthened zamindars and taluqdars as intermediaries. In Awadh, confiscation was followed by restoration to many taluqdars who submitted. Landed elites received titles, council seats, and ceremonial recognition. This was not universal landlord control, but it signaled caution toward changes that might alienate property holders.

Social reform slowed at official initiative. Government proclaimed religious neutrality, although law, education, census categories, courts, and missionary presence continued to reshape society. Neutrality meant political caution more than absence of cultural power.

Frontier and foreign policy

India's foreign policy served imperial security, not an autonomous Indian electorate. British strategists feared Russian influence through Central Asia, protected routes and buffers, and used Indian revenue and troops.

Afghanistan: John Lawrence's "masterly inactivity" preferred limited intervention; Lytton's "forward policy" produced the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Abdur Rahman later ruled internally while Britain influenced external relations. The Durand agreement of 1893 demarcated spheres but divided Pashtun regions and did not pacify the frontier.

North-West Frontier: repeated expeditions, subsidies, roads, posts, and tribal policies alternated coercion with negotiation. The North-West Frontier Province was created in 1901.

Burma: the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885 ended the Konbaung monarchy; Upper Burma was annexed and administered as part of British India.

Tibet: Curzon's 1903–04 expedition under Younghusband sought to block presumed Russian influence and force commercial-diplomatic access. The invasion revealed how strategic suspicion could produce violence without a proportionate threat.

Foreign campaigns expanded imperial reach while their fiscal burdens fell heavily on India.

Information, communications, and famine administration

Crown rule became more capable of seeing and moving across territory. Census operations, gazetteers, cadastral surveys, ethnographic classification, criminal intelligence, railways, postal systems, and telegraphs connected district knowledge to provincial and central offices. These systems served several purposes at once: troop movement, market integration, taxation, disaster reporting, and political surveillance. Their later use by Indian travelers, traders, newspapers, and nationalists was real but did not erase the priorities that shaped investment.

Famines exposed the limits of centralized competence. Railways could move grain, but purchasing power, export flows, revenue pressure, official ideas about market discipline, and restrictive relief tests affected survival. Famine Commissions after the crises of the 1870s and 1890s produced codes for scarcity declaration, relief works, gratuitous aid, and administrative responsibility. Implementation varied, and fear of expenditure repeatedly narrowed relief. The contrast between elaborate information and preventable mortality weakened claims of benevolent rule.

Representation created an imperial dilemma

Councils and local boards were intended to gather information, distribute administrative burdens, and associate dependable elites with government. Once Indians entered them, they used budgets, questions, resolutions, and public reporting to expose military expenditure, taxation, famine policy, and racial discrimination. Limited participation therefore generated demands for wider participation. The Raj could expand consultation to improve legitimacy, but each expansion revealed that final power remained unaccountable. This contradiction helped turn educated professionals from petitioning collaborators into organized nationalists. Representation became both a safety mechanism and an unintended training ground for opposition.

Interpretations and debates

Thomas Metcalf describes the post-1857 order as cautious and conservative: rulers sought allies among princes and landlords and replaced reformist confidence with hierarchy. This does not mean administrative inactivity; surveys, communications, policing, and frontier interventions expanded.

Bernard Cohn emphasizes imperial ceremony as a technology of rule. The 1877 Assemblage classified princes and officials in a visible hierarchy, making Crown sovereignty appear traditional and universal.

Anil Seal and Cambridge-school scholarship highlight collaboration, patronage, and competition among Indian elites within councils and local institutions. Nationalist analysis replies that collaboration occurred within an unequal structure whose decisive authority remained British.

The army's "martial race" doctrine can be read as a lesson drawn from loyalty in 1857, but modern scholarship treats it as a constructed political classification that reshaped communities rather than discovered fixed military qualities.

Balanced judgement: Crown rule combined institutional continuity with a new alliance strategy, racial ideology, and closer metropolitan command. Decentralization widened administration without transferring sovereignty.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1858	Government of India Act and Queen's Proclamation	Transfers rule to Crown and declares a new public policy.
1859–61	Army reorganization commissions	Rebalance European and Indian forces and revise recruitment.
1861	Indian Councils Act	Begins limited association and restores provincial legislation.
1861	Indian Civil Service Act	Reserves specified posts for covenanted service while validating some appointments.
1861	Indian High Courts Act	Replaces Supreme and Sadar courts with High Courts from 1862.
1861	Police Act	Creates provincial civil constabularies under inspectors-general.
1868–72	Mayo's financial decentralization	Assigns selected services and fixed grants to provinces.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1876	Royal Titles Act	Authorizes “Empress of India” title.
1877	Delhi Imperial Assemblage	Publicly stages Crown paramountcy and hierarchy.
1878	Vernacular Press Act and Arms Act	Reveals racial and political inequality under Lytton.
1878–80	Second Anglo-Afghan War	“Forward” frontier policy produces costly intervention.
1882	Ripon’s local self-government resolution	Expands non-official and elected elements in municipalities and district boards.
1883–84	Ilbert Bill controversy	European opposition forces dilution of judicial equality.
1885–86	Third Anglo-Burmese War and annexation	Extends Indian imperial administration eastward.
1886–87	Aitchison Commission	Reclassifies superior, provincial, and subordinate services.
1892	Indian Councils Act	Enlarges councils and permits indirect recommendation and budget questions.
1893	Durand Line agreement	Marks an Afghan frontier sphere without ending frontier conflict.
1902–04	Police Commission and administrative reforms	Improves structure while preserving policing as an instrument of rule.
1903–04	Curzon’s Tibet expedition	Demonstrates continuing strategic intervention beyond formal Indian borders.

High-confusion comparisons

Area	Change after 1858	Major continuity
Metropolitan control	Secretary of State replaces Company double control	Policy remains directed from Britain.
Central executive	Governor-General also styled Viceroy	Executive council and authoritarian power continue.
Army	Recruitment, ratios, artillery, counterpoise altered	European command and Indian fiscal burden remain.
Civil service	Competition and gradual Indian entry	Senior racial monopoly persists.
Princes	Lapse abandoned and treaties reassured	Paramountcy and Residents restrict sovereignty.
Local government	More boards and elected non-officials	Officials, narrow franchise, and weak finance limit autonomy.

Self-test

1. What institutions replaced Company double control in 1858?
2. Distinguish the Governor-General and Viceroy titles.
3. What did Queen Victoria's Proclamation promise, and what did it not grant?
4. How did the Indian Councils Act 1861 change legislation?
5. Why was financial decentralization not equivalent to provincial autonomy?
6. What were Ripon's local-government aims and limits?
7. How did the ICS remain exclusionary despite competition?
8. Name four principles of army reorganization after 1857.
9. What did the Ilbert Bill controversy reveal?
10. How did princely policy combine protection and subordination?

11. Compare “masterly inactivity” and the “forward policy” in Afghanistan.
12. What best defines the balance of change and continuity after 1858?

Answer key

1. A Secretary of State for India and Council of India replaced the Board of Control and Court of Directors under parliamentary Crown government.
2. Governor-General denoted statutory executive head of British India; Viceroy denoted the monarch’s representative, especially toward princes.
3. It promised treaty respect, religious non-interference, legal protection, and formal office eligibility; it did not grant representative self-government.
4. It added nominated legislative members, including Indians, restored provincial lawmaking, and preserved Viceroy control and emergency ordinance power.
5. Provinces received responsibility for selected services and fixed funds while the centre retained strategic policy, major revenues, and overriding supervision.
6. Ripon favored non-official majorities, election, and non-official chairmen; narrow franchises, official oversight, and weak revenue restricted results.
7. The London venue, English classical curriculum, cost, falling age limit, and racial preference restricted effective Indian access.
8. Higher European ratio, European artillery monopoly, altered recruitment, mixed communities, European command, and soldier isolation are valid.
9. European resistance to Indian judges exposed the racial boundary beneath proclaimed legal equality.
10. Adoption and dynasties were protected, while Residents, paramountcy, and restrictions on diplomacy and defence denied external sovereignty.
11. Masterly inactivity preferred limited intervention and a stable

buffer; forward policy sought active control through missions, occupation, and war.

12. Crown rule preserved centralized district administration while adding closer London control, reorganized coercion, princely-landlord alliances, racial ideology, and limited participation.

Closing perspective

Crown transfer centralized public responsibility in Britain but did not democratize Indian government. Governor-General and Viceroy were two roles of the same office, not separate rulers.

Religion, Caste, Gender, and Community after 1858

1866: Deoband and the Brahmo split show two different strategies: autonomous Islamic learning and competing universalist reform bodies.

1867: Prarthana Samaj organized monotheistic worship and gradual social reform in western India.

Reform moved from individual critique to organized public action

Post-1858 reform relied increasingly on durable institutions. Schools trained new constituencies; journals circulated arguments; sabhas, samajes, missions and conferences collected funds and elected committees. Colonial courts made marriage, inheritance and religious identity matters of codified law. Censuses classified populations by religion and caste. Municipal and legislative institutions rewarded organized representation. Reform was therefore neither a simple imitation of Europe nor a timeless recovery of tradition. It was a struggle over who could interpret inherited practice under new political conditions.

Several movements combined selective appropriation with rejection. Modern printing could disseminate claims of ancient authority. English education could be used to defend Vedic, Islamic

or Sikh learning. Voluntary associations borrowed modern organizational forms while presenting themselves as restorations. The resulting public sphere enabled debate, but it also favoured literate urban groups able to finance schools, newspapers and conferences.

Brahmo and Prarthana currents: universalism, schism and gradualism

The Brahmo movement continued to advocate monotheism, ethical religion, women's education and reform of marriage. Keshab Chandra Sen, who joined in 1858, expanded its public reach and cultivated interreligious universalism. Yet leadership and doctrine generated repeated divisions. In 1866, Sen's Brahmo Samaj of India separated from Debendranath Tagore's Adi Brahmo Samaj. In 1878, opponents formed the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj after Sen arranged the marriage of his underage daughter to the minor Maharaja of Cooch Behar. The dispute mattered because a movement opposing child marriage appeared to compromise its principles for elite alliance.

The Prarthana Samaj, founded by Atmaram Pandurang in 1867, developed a related but regionally distinct current in western India. M.G. Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar favoured monotheistic devotion, widow remarriage, women's education, opposition to caste restriction and patient institutional work. Its strategy was incremental: alter social custom through persuasion, schools and associations without making a complete rupture with Hindu society. That caution helped secure respectable support but limited challenges to property, caste power and patriarchal authority.

Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and service-oriented Vedanta

Ramakrishna Paramahansa's religious practice emphasized experiential devotion and the possibility of reaching the divine through different paths. Swami Vivekananda translated this pluralism into a public ethic. At Chicago in 1893, he presented Vedanta as universal and defended Indian spiritual traditions against colonial contempt. In 1897 he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, whose monasteries, schools, hospitals and relief work joined spiritual discipline to service.

Vivekananda's emphasis on strength, self-respect and service influenced a generation living under racial subordination. His language could sustain cultural confidence without requiring one uniform ritual practice. Yet this current mostly sought moral and social regeneration, not an immediate programme for abolishing caste relations or redistributing resources. Its universal language also coexisted with an increasingly Hindu vocabulary in public life.

Arya Samaj: Vedic authority, education and boundary-making

Dayanand Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj in Mumbai in 1875; Lahore became a particularly important centre after 1877. *Satyarth Prakash* argued that the Vedas contained pure monotheistic truth and rejected image worship, priestly superstition, child marriage and hereditary caste understood as birth status. The movement promoted women's education and widow remarriage, though practice varied across its branches.

Education generated an important internal divide. The Dayanand Anglo-Vedic network combined modern subjects and English with Vedic instruction. The Gurukul tendency preferred an environment modelled on ancient residential learning and guarded against Western cultural influence. Both produced schools, presses and disciplined cadres.

Shuddhi sought to bring former Hindus or members of other communities into the Arya fold. It countered conversion and questioned fixed religious membership, but in a competitive religious field it also sharpened boundaries. Cow-protection mobilization, Hindi advocacy and polemical debate could connect social service with communal rivalry. Arya Samaj should therefore be remembered as both a reforming educational network and an agent of Hindu consolidation.

Muslim reform: Aligarh, Deoband and Ahmadiyya were distinct projects

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan treated educational disadvantage after 1857 as an urgent Muslim problem. The Scientific Society translated modern works; *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq* encouraged reasoned social discussion; the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh combined Western education with Muslim cultural formation. The Muhammadan Educational Conference, founded in 1886, extended the network. Sir Syed argued that reinterpretation should reconcile Islam with reason and modern science.

Aligarh's early social base was disproportionately male, landed and ashraf. Sir Syed's loyalty to the Raj and later suspicion of Congress participation reflected fear that representative politics would leave Muslims vulnerable to a Hindu majority. This stance cannot be treated as the view of all Muslims: it arose from a specific north Indian elite setting and changed in later generations.

Darul Uloom Deoband, founded in 1866 by Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, followed another path. It preserved Islamic jurisprudence and scholarly training through community support rather than state patronage. Its curriculum and network of graduates disciplined religious learning in an altered political world. Deoband was not simply "anti-modern": it used print, fundraising and a formal institution while resisting Aligarh's educational synthesis. Its political descendants also di-

verged; important Deobandi ulama later supported composite nationalism.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad organized the Ahmadiyya movement at Qadian in 1889. It defended Islam through print, argument and missionary organization while making theological claims rejected by most Sunni and Shia authorities. The three currents therefore cannot be collapsed into one Muslim response: Aligarh prioritized modern higher education, Deoband autonomous traditional scholarship, and Ahmadiyya a distinctive missionary-theological renewal.

Sikh and Parsi reform created community institutions

The Singh Sabha movement began at Amritsar in 1873 and Lahore in 1879. It expanded Punjabi and Gurmukhi print, religious instruction and schools, culminating institutionally in projects such as Khalsa College, Amritsar, opened in 1892. The Lahore-oriented Tat Khalsa current promoted a more clearly bounded Khalsa identity, distinguished Sikh practice from Hindu custom and standardized markers of observance. This strengthened education and collective confidence, but it also reduced the space for overlapping identities and diverse local practices.

Among Parsis, the Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha, founded in 1851 and active after 1858, promoted education, debate and reform of social customs. Naoroji Furdunji and Dadabhai Naoroji used journals and associations to reinterpret Zoroastrian practice and address women's education and marriage. A small, urban and commercially connected community could organize effectively, though internal class and gender inequalities persisted.

The Theosophical Society offered a different kind of cultural institution. Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott founded it in New York in 1875, moved to India in 1879 and established its headquarters at Adyar in 1882. Its celebration of Asian religious traditions challenged missionary contempt and encouraged cultural

self-confidence. Annie Besant, who joined in 1889 and settled in India in 1893, linked educational work to later nationalist politics. Yet romantic celebration could detach “ancient wisdom” from historical inequality and make revival seem equivalent to reform.

Phule made caste power, labour and knowledge central

Jyotirao Phule’s Satyashodhak Samaj, founded at Pune in 1873, represented a more structural challenge than reforms confined to upper-caste custom. Phule interpreted caste as a system of Brahmanical domination over Shudras and Ati-Shudras. *Gulam-giri* compared caste oppression to slavery and constructed a counter-history in which productive Bahujans had been subjugated. He criticized priestly monopoly, denial of education and exploitation of cultivators.

Satyashodhak ceremonies reduced dependence on Brahman priests. Schools associated with Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule placed education at the heart of liberation. Savitribai was not merely an assistant: she taught, administered institutions, wrote poetry, organized women and confronted hostility. Their work joined caste and gender, although later non-Brahman coalitions did not always preserve that radical intersection.

Kerala movements linked sacred equality to material access

Narayana Guru’s consecration of a Shiva image at Aruvippuram in 1888 directly challenged the monopoly of Brahman priests. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, organized in 1903, built schools, temples and associations among Ezhavas and articulated dignity through the principle of one caste, one religion and one God for humanity. The movement could facilitate

mobility and public organization; some followers pursued Sanskritization, while others moved toward universalism or political representation.

Ayyankali organized Pulaya and other oppressed agricultural communities around access to public roads, schooling and fairer labour relations. The Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, formed in 1907, gave these demands an institutional base. His agitation showed that temple status alone could not substitute for bodily freedom, education and economic bargaining.

The Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924–25 challenged restrictions on the roads surrounding a temple in Travancore. It drew local activists, Congress workers, E.V. Ramasamy and wider support. The settlement opened some approach roads but not the temple itself. Its partial result captures a recurring pattern: public-access victories could precede, but did not automatically deliver, full religious or social equality.

Non-Brahman politics moved from association to representation

In the Madras Presidency, education and government employment were distributed unevenly, and many intermediate and dominant castes viewed Brahman prominence in professions and administration as a political problem. The South Indian Liberal Federation, commonly called the Justice Party, formed in 1916. Its Non-Brahmin Manifesto demanded representation in councils, education and public services. After dyarchy began, Justice Party governments supported communal reservation through the 1921 Communal Government Order.

This politics broadened access to state institutions, but “non-Brahman” was not a single social class. Landholders and prosperous castes could speak for a coalition while Dalits and labourers retained distinct interests. Reliance on constitutional cooperation with the Raj also weakened the Justice Party’s anti-colonial credibility.

E.V. Ramasamy, known as Periyar, launched the Self-Respect Movement in 1925 after conflict with caste hierarchy within Congress politics. It attacked Brahmanical ritual authority, enforced endogamy, religious superstition and women's subordination. Self-respect marriages without Brahman priests made everyday family practice a political site. Rationalism and Dravidian identity gave anti-caste criticism a mass cultural language, though its later trajectory belongs to a wider history of regional politics.

B.R. Ambedkar's Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, founded in 1924, and Mahad Satyagraha of 1927 established a crucial distinction: oppressed castes required independent organization and enforceable civic rights, not benevolent upper-caste reform. At Mahad, Dalits asserted the right to draw water from a public tank. The action transformed equality from moral appeal into collective claim.

Women were agents, not a social category acted upon

Women's reform after 1858 cannot be reduced to male campaigns against child marriage or for widow remarriage. Pandita Ramabai formed the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882 and opened Sharada Sadan in 1889 for high-caste widows. Her scholarship, travels and Christian conversion made her controversial, but also demonstrated a woman's authority to judge both Hindu patriarchy and missionary paternalism.

Tarabai Shinde's *Stri Purush Tulana* (1882) exposed the sexual double standard that punished women while excusing men. The Rukhmabai case of the 1880s publicized consent, child marriage and a wife's right to refuse cohabitation; Rukhmabai later trained as a physician. Ramabai Ranade's Seva Sadan trained women and supported public work. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain combined satire, fiction and institution-building; the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, established in 1911, expanded Muslim women's education.

Women also created broader federations. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani founded Bharat Stree Mahamandal in 1910. Margaret Cousins, Annie Besant and Indian colleagues established the Women's Indian Association in 1917, linking reform to suffrage. The All India Women's Conference, founded in 1927, began with educational concerns and developed into a major platform for legal and social reform. These bodies remained weighted toward educated and relatively privileged women, but they made women citizens and political organizers rather than symbols of community honour alone.

Law registered reform but did not guarantee transformation

Legislation arose from public controversy, administrative priorities and pressure by reformers. The Age of Consent Act of 1891 raised the age of consent for girls within marriage from ten to twelve. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, effective in 1930, set minimum marriage ages of fourteen for girls and eighteen for boys. These standards were historically significant but modest, weakly enforced and unable by themselves to alter poverty, family authority or caste endogamy.

Legal intervention also provoked the question of colonial legitimacy. Conservatives could portray reform as foreign intrusion, while nationalists sometimes avoided gender and caste questions to preserve unity. Women and oppressed-caste activists exposed the false choice between colonial paternalism and untouched custom: both imperial power and indigenous hierarchy could be criticized simultaneously.

Reform's double movement: emancipation and consolidation

Education, service and association widened participation. At the same time, print polemics, censuses, personal-law cat-

egories and competitive representation encouraged communities to define authorized doctrine and membership. Shuddhi, cow protection, Hindi–Urdu conflict and Tat Khalsa standardization did not mechanically cause communalism, but they made boundaries more politically usable.

The strongest evaluation is therefore neither celebration nor dismissal. Reform created languages of rights, dignity, reason, service and self-respect. It also often treated upper-caste, middle-class men as the normal public, disciplined women as bearers of community, and left material inequality intact. Anti-caste and women-led initiatives expanded the agenda precisely by identifying these limits.

Interpretations and debates

Modernization or reconstructed tradition? Kenneth W. Jones interprets reform movements as responses created within a colonial social environment, not simple survivals. Their presses, committees and schools were modern organizational forms even when their claims invoked ancient purity. This approach avoids treating Westernization and revival as opposites.

Gender and the national “inner domain.” Partha Chatterjee argues that anticolonial nationalism divided modern life into an external material domain and an inner spiritual-cultural domain. Women became emblems of the protected inner sphere. The argument explains why education for women could coexist with demands for feminine domestic respectability. It is a powerful model, but regional and women-led histories show that women also crossed, negotiated and remade that boundary.

Brahmanical patriarchy. Uma Chakravarti emphasizes the interaction of caste hierarchy, control of women’s sexuality and reproduction. This framework clarifies why widowhood, endogamy, child marriage and access to learning were not separate “social evils” but mechanisms reproducing caste. Tarabai Shinde, Phule and later Ambedkar attacked this connection more directly than reforms focused only on respectable domes-

ticity.

Phule and non-Brahman radicalism. Gail Omvedt treats Phule's thought as a democratic cultural revolt by subordinated castes rather than a derivative branch of elite reform. Rosalind O'Hanlon similarly foregrounds lower-caste intellectual agency and the creation of a non-Brahman political identity. A qualification is essential: later non-Brahman coalitions could be led by prosperous castes and did not automatically represent Dalits or women.

Community formation. Historians such as Gyanendra Pandey stress that communal identities were historically produced through mobilization, classification and conflict, not inherited as fixed blocs. Singh Sabha standardization, shuddhi and cow-protection activity illustrate this process. No single movement "caused" communalism; colonial institutions, electoral incentives, print controversy and local competition interacted.

Reform and revival as a mixed legacy. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar draw attention to the coexistence of emancipatory language and conservative gender or community projects. Reform could attack one hierarchy while stabilizing another. The defensible conclusion is conditional: assess each movement by its social base, institutional practice and treatment of caste and gender, not by whether it called itself reformist or revivalist.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1864	Sir Syed Ahmad Khan establishes the Scientific Society	Promotes translation, modern knowledge and Muslim educational reconstruction.
1866	Darul Uloom Deoband founded; Brahmo Samaj divides	Marks contrasting institutional responses to colonial modernity and an internal Brahmo dispute over authority.
1867	Prarthana Samaj founded in Mumbai (Bombay)	Gives western Indian reform a durable devotional and social platform.
1870	<i>Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq</i> begins	Creates a reformist Muslim public sphere around education, conduct and reason.
1873	Satyashodhak Samaj founded; <i>Gulamgiri</i> published	Places caste power, priestly domination and cultivators at the centre of reform.
1873, 1879	Singh Sabhas founded at Amritsar and Lahore	Promote Sikh education, print and a more standardized Khalsa identity.
1875	Arya Samaj founded; Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College project begins; Theosophical Society founded	Three distinct institutional responses combine education, religious recovery and social organization.
1878	Sadharan Brahmo Samaj formed	The marriage controversy tests reformers' consistency and democratic organization.
1882	Arya Mahila Samaj and <i>Stri Purush Tulana</i>	Demonstrate women's organizing and feminist criticism of unequal moral standards.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1882	Theosophical headquarters moves to Adyar	Makes Chennai (Madras) a major centre of religious-cultural revival.
1888	Aruvippuram consecration	Narayana Guru directly contests Brahmanical control of temple authority.
1889	Sharada Sadan opens; Ahmadiyya movement formally organized	Links women's institutional autonomy with another distinct current of Muslim renewal.
1893	Vivekananda addresses the Parliament of Religions, Chicago	Gives Vedantic universalism global visibility.
1897	Ramakrishna Mission founded	Organizes monastic discipline, education, relief and service.
1903	SNDP Yogam formed	Converts Ezhava reform into a sustained associational movement.
1907	Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham founded	Ayyankali organizes oppressed-caste claims to roads, schools and labour dignity.
1909	Seva Sadan established	Ramabai Ranade builds training and social support for women.
1911	Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School established in Kolkata (Calcutta)	Begum Rokeya advances Muslim women's education and intellectual autonomy.
1916	South Indian Liberal Federation, later called Justice Party, formed	Gives non-Brahman representation a provincial political vehicle.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1917	Women’s Indian Asso- ciation founded	Connects education and social reform with suffrage and citizenship.
1924–25	Vaikom Satyagraha	Challenges caste restrictions on public roads around a major temple in Travancore.
1925	Self-Respect Move- ment begins	Periyar links anti- caste politics with rationalism, women’s equality and rejection of Brahmanical ritual authority.
1927	Mahad Satyagraha; All India Women’s Conference founded	Public water access and coordinated women’s reform be- come all-India politi- cal questions.
1929	Child Marriage Re- straint Act	Establishes minimum marriage ages, but enforcement and patriarchal power remain serious con- straints.

High-confusion comparisons

Movement	Central strategy	Principal social reach	Transformative contribution	Major limit or danger
Prarthana Samaj	Devotion plus gradual social reform	Western Indian educated elites	Widow remarriage, education, critique of caste restriction	Avoided structural confrontation with caste and property.
Arya Samaj	Vedic purification, education, shuddhi	Strong urban and trading networks, especially Punjab	Schools, self-confidence, criticism of hereditary caste	Polemics and reconversion could sharpen communal boundaries.
Aligarh movement	Modern higher education and reinterpretation	North Indian Muslim ashraf and professionals	Built educational capacity and a modern public sphere	Elite, male and initially loyalist orientation.
Deoband	Community-supported Islamic scholarship	Ulama, students and local religious networks	Preserved autonomy and scholarly continuity	Social reform agenda differed from modernist and women-led priorities.
Satyashodhak Samaj	Anti-priestly organization and counter-history	Shudra–Ati-Shudra constituencies in Maharashtra	Made caste domination and knowledge central	Uneven reach; later coalitions could dilute its radicalism.
Justice Party	Provincial representation and reservation	Diverse non-Brahman groups, often elite-led	Opened offices and education beyond Brahman dominance	Colonial cooperation and internal caste inequalities.
Women's associations	Schools, conferences, suffrage and legal reform	Mainly educated urban women	Established women as political agents	Limited rural, working-class and lower-caste representation.

Often confused pair	Correct distinction
Religious reform and secularization	Many movements reinterpreted religion rather than removing it from public life.
Caste reform and caste abolition	Improving conduct within hierarchy differed from destroying graded inequality and endogamy.
Non-Brahman and Dalit politics	Their interests could overlap, but dominant non-Brahman castes did not automatically represent untouchable communities.
Women's reform and women's agency	A law about women is not the same as women organizing, writing and setting priorities.
Identity consolidation and communalism	Clearer identity boundaries created capacity for mobilization, but communal antagonism depended on political context.

Self-test

1. Why did associations, schools and print become central to reform after 1858?
2. What caused the Brahmo divisions of 1866 and 1878?
3. How did Prarthana Samaj's method differ from Phule's Satyashodhak strategy?
4. Distinguish Aligarh, Deoband and Ahmadiyya in one sentence each.
5. Why is Arya Samaj remembered as both reforming and boundary-making?
6. What did the Singh Sabha movement institutionalize?
7. How did Phule connect caste with labour and knowledge?
8. Compare Narayana Guru's and Ayyankali's principal methods.
9. Why must non-Brahman and Dalit politics not be treated as identical?
10. Name four women who acted as authors or institution-builders and state one contribution of each.

11. What were the achievement and the limitation of the Child Marriage Restraint Act?
12. What is the strongest balanced interpretation of post-1858 reform?

Answer key

1. They created durable networks, trained constituencies, circulated arguments and converted local grievances into organized public demands within the colonial public sphere.
2. The 1866 division concerned leadership and doctrine between Keshab Chandra Sen and Debendranath Tagore; the 1878 division followed Sen's daughter's underage royal marriage and objections to personal authority.
3. Prarthana Samaj pursued gradual reform within respectable Hindu society; Satyashodhak Samaj challenged Brahmanical domination, priestly monopoly and caste control over knowledge.
4. Aligarh prioritized modern higher education; Deoband preserved autonomous Islamic scholarship; Ahmadiyya developed a distinctive missionary and theological renewal around Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.
5. It built schools and attacked superstition, child marriage and hereditary caste, yet shuddhi and religious polemics could harden Hindu–non-Hindu boundaries.
6. It built Sikh education and Gurmukhi print while promoting a more standardized, distinct Khalsa identity.
7. He argued that priestly control of learning and ritual legitimized the exploitation of productive Shudra and Ati-Shudra majorities.
8. Narayana Guru used consecration, temples and universalist teaching; Ayyankali organized direct struggles over roads, schools and agricultural labour dignity.
9. Non-Brahman coalitions included powerful intermediate castes, whereas Dalit politics required independent action against untouchability and could conflict with those groups' interests.
10. Savitribai Phule built anti-caste education; Pandita Ramabai

founded Arya Mahila Samaj and Sharada Sadan; Tarabai Shinde wrote *Stri Purush Tulana*; Begum Rokeya founded a girls' school and wrote feminist criticism.

11. It established statutory minimum marriage ages, but low thresholds, poor enforcement and household authority sharply limited its immediate effect.
12. Reform widened education, dignity, service and rights claims, but remained uneven and sometimes reproduced class, caste, patriarchal and communal boundaries.

Closing perspective

Post-1858 reform was an institutional field built through print, schools, associations, courts and public campaigns. Religious revival and social reform frequently overlapped; neither label alone predicts a movement's social consequences.

Associations, Congress, and Moderate Nationalism

1836–52: Early associations in Bengal, Madras and Bombay petitioned on land, law and administration but remained elite and provincial.

1866: Dadabhai Naoroji's East India Association carried Indian questions into British public debate.

Nationalism grew from colonial unification and colonial contradiction

British rule created an administrative and economic framework covering most of the subcontinent. Railways, telegraphy, postal networks and a common bureaucratic vocabulary connected distant regions. English education gave sections of the intelligentsia access to liberal, utilitarian and nationalist ideas, while the Indian-language press translated political claims into regional publics. This material unification did not automatically create nationalism. It became politically significant because Indians increasingly recognized a shared conflict between colonial priorities and Indian welfare.

Economic experience gave that conflict material force. Export orientation, deindustrialization, recurrent famine, heavy land revenue, unequal tariffs, military expenditure and the re-

mittance of salaries and pensions suggested that poverty was produced by policy rather than fate. Educated Indians also encountered racial exclusion in the civil service, courts, clubs and volunteer corps. The Raj claimed equality and progress while preserving European privilege.

Historical and cultural recovery helped counter colonial assertions that Indians were incapable of self-government. Socio-religious reform produced organizational experience and public debate. International examples, including Italian unification, Irish constitutional agitation and other nationalist movements, made the nation-state imaginable. None of these factors alone explains the new politics; nationalism arose from their interaction.

Early associations trained an elite constitutional public

The Bangabhasha Prakasika Sabha, Landholders' Society and Bengal British India Society initiated organized political discussion in Bengal. The British Indian Association, formed in 1851 by merger, petitioned Parliament and the government on administration and representation. Its leadership was largely zamindari, and its high subscription restricted membership. The Madras Native Association and Bombay Association, both formed in 1852, similarly spoke through provincial notables.

These bodies established useful practices: drafting memorials, collecting information, holding meetings and addressing British officials. Yet they usually represented local elites, remained intermittent and relied on the expectation that informed rulers would correct abuses.

Dadabhai Naoroji founded the East India Association in London in 1866. Its importance lay not only in location but in strategy: Indian questions were presented to parliamentarians, intellectuals and the British public. Naoroji's later drain analysis turned this British connection into an arena of anti-imperial argument.

The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, founded in 1870 and associated with Mahadev Govind Ranade and later Gopal Krishna Gokhale, claimed to represent public opinion and investigated agrarian and administrative questions. It attempted to connect educated leadership with local conditions, although its representative procedures did not amount to mass democracy.

The Indian League of 1875 and Indian Association of 1876 marked a more activist phase in Bengal. Surendranath Banerjea and Ananda Mohan Bose set a lower membership subscription, held public meetings and sought cooperation beyond Bengal. The Indian Association's tours and campaigns demonstrated how a provincial organization could build all-India issues.

In the south and west, the Madras Mahajana Sabha, formed in 1884, and Bombay Presidency Association, formed in 1885, created regional networks of lawyers, journalists and public figures. By 1885, the infrastructure for a recurring all-India assembly already existed.

Campaigns before 1885 converted grievances into common issues

The reduction of the maximum age for the Indian Civil Service examination from twenty-one to nineteen in 1876 was especially provocative because the examination was held only in London. The Indian Association organized meetings and tours demanding a higher age and simultaneous examinations in India and Britain. The campaign joined equality of opportunity to Indianization of administration.

Lord Lytton's measures deepened discontent. The imperial assemblage at Delhi in 1877 displayed imperial grandeur during severe famine. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 subjected Indian-language newspapers to discriminatory controls, while the Arms Act imposed licensing requirements from which Europeans generally benefited by exemption. Opposition defended civil liberty and revealed racial hierarchy.

Indian public bodies also protested cotton-import policy, expenditure on the Second Afghan War, harsh plantation-labour arrangements and the exclusion of Indians from volunteer forces. These campaigns did not mobilize every social class, but they taught leaders to coordinate across presidencies and to present local injury as an Indian question.

The Ilbert Bill controversy of 1883 was a decisive political education. The proposal would have allowed qualified Indian judges in the mofussil to try European British subjects. European residents organized a furious racial campaign, and the final compromise diluted the principle. Educated Indians learned that liberal claims could collapse when European privilege was threatened. The controversy stimulated meetings, journalism and the search for an all-India organization.

National Conferences created an immediate bridge to Congress

The Indian Association convened the Indian National Conference in Kolkata in 1883 and again in 1885. Delegates discussed representation, civil-service reform and other common demands. The conference demonstrated the feasibility of an annual national assembly.

The first Congress session met from 28 to 31 December 1885 at Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College in Mumbai. It had originally been planned for Pune but shifted because of a cholera outbreak. Seventy-two delegates attended; Womesh Chandra Bonnerjee presided. A.O. Hume, a retired civil servant, helped correspond with provincial leaders and organize the meeting. The second Congress at Kolkata in 1886 absorbed the Indian National Conference's constituency into a larger framework.

Congress aimed to bring politically active Indians into personal contact, reduce provincial and communal prejudice, formulate mature demands and train public opinion. The early sessions deliberately emphasized common political questions. Badruddin Tyabji's presidency in 1887 and leaders from Parsi, Hindu, Mus-

lim and Christian backgrounds expressed a secular institutional norm, though actual participation remained socially narrow.

The safety-valve controversy asks the wrong question if treated as an origin story

The safety-valve thesis claims that Hume, sometimes with Viceroy Dufferin's approval, established Congress to release dangerous discontent harmlessly and prevent revolt. Lala Lajpat Rai and R.P. Dutt helped popularize versions of this argument. Stories about secret reports of impending rebellion gave the claim dramatic support, but firm evidence for such a coordinated official design is lacking. Dufferin's early conversations with Hume do not establish that the government created Congress; his later hostility is clear.

Bipan Chandra rejects the safety-valve thesis as an adequate explanation. He calls Hume a "lightning conductor": Indian leaders used his status to reduce official suspicion during a vulnerable phase. The distinction matters. A conductor can protect and facilitate a structure that already exists; it does not generate the political energy. Pre-1885 associations, campaigns and national conferences demonstrate indigenous preparation.

A separate claim gives the Theosophical Society decisive credit through an alleged 1884 meeting at Adyar. Chronological and participant evidence is inconsistent, and leading founders did not behave as if Congress were their organizational creation. The most defensible conclusion treats Hume as an important convener within an Indian-led historical process.

Moderate social base was narrow but not socially uniform

The dominant Congress leadership from 1885 to 1905 is conventionally called Moderate. It included Dadabhai Naoroji, W.C. Bonnerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji, K.T. Telang, Dinshaw Wacha, M.G. Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, R.C. Dutt, G. Subramania Iyer and P. Ananda Charlu.

They were mainly English-educated urban professionals: lawyers, journalists, teachers, merchants, doctors and members of new public institutions. Upper-caste and high-status groups were overrepresented, and the movement's strongest centres were presidency towns and provincial cities. Peasants, workers, women and most subordinated castes rarely participated directly in Congress proceedings.

It is still misleading to describe Congress as the automatic mouthpiece of one capitalist class. Industrial capital was limited, commercial interests varied, and leaders often depended on professional rather than business income. The early nationalists claimed to represent a nation that was politically being made. Their representation was aspirational and ideological, not an accurate sociological cross-section.

Moderate methods were constitutional instruments and a pedagogy

Moderates used resolutions, memorials, petitions, public meetings, newspaper campaigns, deputations to Britain and intervention in legislative councils. The phrase "prayer, petition and protest" summarizes their constitutional repertoire, but caricaturing it as mere prayer misses the intended mechanism.

First, they collected facts and exposed contradictions in official claims. Second, repeated annual resolutions created a coherent programme across regions. Third, public meetings and press discussion trained participants to think in national categories. Fourth, legislative questions forced budgets and

policies into limited public scrutiny. Fifth, British committees and parliamentary allies made imperial policy contestable at its metropolitan centre.

Moderates often professed faith in British justice, liberal traditions and the benefits of connection with Britain. Some belief was genuine; some was strategic language designed to protect a young organization. Over time, repeated rejection weakened the assumption that British rule could be reformed simply by informing British opinion.

Demands linked representation, economy and civil equality

Moderate demands formed a connected programme rather than a collection of favours:

- expand legislative councils, introduce elected elements and give members meaningful budget powers;
- hold simultaneous civil-service examinations and Indianize higher administration;
- separate executive and judicial functions to reduce arbitrary power;
- protect freedom of speech and press and end racial discrimination;
- reduce military expenditure, Home Charges and costly imperial wars;
- lower salt taxation and excessive land-revenue burdens;
- support technical education, irrigation and Indian industries;
- reform local self-government and move gradually toward representative self-government.

Their economic programme was especially important. Naoroji's drain theory, R.C. Dutt's critique of revenue policy and Ranade's arguments for industrial development showed that colonial rule rested on an economic structure harmful to India. This moved nationalism beyond demands for more posts for educated Indians.

Achievements were cumulative rather than spectacular

The first achievement was organizational continuity. Congress met annually, rotated its location and created a common platform in a subcontinent divided by language, region, caste and religion. It normalized the claim that Indians could deliberate on central policy as one political community.

Second, Moderates developed a systematic economic critique of empire. Poverty became evidence of colonial exploitation and policy failure, not an explanation for continued foreign rule. This ideological shift undermined the Raj's moral claim.

Third, they defended civil liberties, equality before law and representative institutions. Even limited campaigns created a political vocabulary later mass movements could use. Fourth, their secular norm resisted official attempts to classify political claims by community, though the organization had not achieved equal social participation.

The Indian Councils Act of 1892 was a limited response to sustained pressure. It enlarged councils, introduced an indirect recommendatory process often described as election, and allowed restricted budget discussion and questions. Members could not vote the budget, supplementary questions were barred, and official control remained. The measure was therefore both a concession and proof of constitutional inadequacy.

Limits arose from both context and political choice

Congress had a narrow organizational reach. English dominated proceedings; annual sessions and urban associations did not create permanent village-level organization. Peasant taxation and worker hardship appeared in resolutions more often than peasants and workers appeared as political agents. Women's participation was small. Leaders feared that social

conflict or direct action might fracture a fragile national coalition.

Moderate faith in persuading British opinion underestimated imperial interests. The government did not simply misunderstand Indian welfare; colonial power benefited from military, fiscal and racial hierarchy. Appeals without leverage produced modest concessions.

Yet it is anachronistic to demand the techniques of the 1920s from the 1880s. Communication networks, organizational experience and a shared national vocabulary were still developing. The more precise criticism is that the Moderates built political consciousness but did not sufficiently convert it into sustained popular organization.

Government response combined ridicule, restriction and selective concession

Officials initially watched Congress cautiously. Some expected educated notables to provide manageable advice, and a few attended early social functions. As criticism deepened, official policy became openly hostile. In 1888, Dufferin dismissed Congress as representing a “microscopic minority.” Officials were discouraged from participation; princes and landlords were courted as counterweights; communal and social differences were emphasized.

The Raj used press restrictions, sedition law, surveillance and administrative pressure against assertive politics while conceding tightly controlled council reform. This was not a single continuous policy of repression. It was a flexible strategy: isolate nationalists, cultivate loyalists, divide constituencies and offer reforms that expanded discussion without transferring power.

By 1905, Congress had created an anti-colonial public but faced a strategic question. If petitions and council speech could expose rule but not compel change, boycott, swadeshi and wider participation appeared increasingly necessary.

Interpretations and debates

Nationalist culmination. The nationalist interpretation treats Congress as the natural culmination of political associations, economic criticism and countrywide campaigns. This view correctly restores Indian initiative and long preparation. It must still explain why a socially narrow intelligentsia, rather than a mass coalition, founded the first durable national platform.

Safety valve and colonial design. R.P. Dutt's Marxist account gave weight to the idea that Hume and officials hoped to contain unrest, while also characterizing early Congress as bourgeois. Lala Lajpat Rai repeated a safety-valve explanation before later nationalist development changed the debate. The evidentiary weakness lies in turning possible motives of one organizer into the cause of an entire movement.

Bipan Chandra's political-education thesis. Bipan Chandra argues that early nationalists were genuine anti-imperialists conducting the first stage of a long struggle. Their task was to expose the contradiction between colonialism and Indian interests and create national consciousness. Hume functioned as a "lightning conductor," offering limited protection from repression. This interpretation makes ideological achievement visible without denying social narrowness.

Cambridge School. Anil Seal and related historians emphasize competition among local elites for patronage, office and influence. Provincial networks and personal rivalries did shape organization. The approach is strongest when explaining recruitment and faction; it is weaker when it reduces drain theory, civil-liberties campaigns and sustained all-India claims to disguised competition for jobs.

Intelligentsia and class. Sumit Sarkar describes much of the educated leadership as "traditional" intellectuals whose professional position gave some autonomy from productive classes. This helps explain both ideological seriousness and weak mass connection. Early nationalism was not simply capitalist command, but its leaders often spoke for peasants and workers without organizing them.

Regional and social construction. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay stresses that the new middle class and public sphere were regionally uneven and embedded in caste and community networks. The nation was made through negotiation among these settings, not awakened as a pre-existing homogeneous entity. The most balanced account therefore joins real anti-colonial ideology to careful analysis of who could participate.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1836	Bangabhasha Prakasika Sabha established	Early public association discusses administrative questions in Bengal.
1838	Landholders' Society formed	Organizes zamindar interests through constitutional petition.
1843	Bengal British India Society formed	Broadens inquiry into the condition and rights of Indians.
1851	British Indian Association formed	Merger creates a prominent Bengal petitioning body, though landed elites dominate.
1852	Madras Native Association and Bombay Association formed	Shows simultaneous growth of provincial political organization.
1866	East India Association established in London	Dadabhai Naoroji gives Indian grievances a British platform.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1870	Poona Sarvajanik Sabha formed	Develops representation claims and public work in western India.
1875	Indian League formed	Seeks political education and a broader nationalist outlook.
1876	Indian Association formed	Surendranath Banerjea and Ananda Mohan Bose build a lower-fee, more activist organization.
1877–78	Delhi imperial assemblage amid famine; Vernacular Press and Arms Acts	Lytton's policies dramatize imperial extravagance, censorship and racial discrimination.
1876–79	All-India agitation over ICS age reduction	Demonstrates coordinated campaigning and demands simultaneous examinations.
1883	Ilbert Bill controversy; first Indian National Conference	Racial opposition politicizes educated Indians while conference practice anticipates Congress.
1884	Madras Mahajana Sabha formed	Creates a durable southern political association.
1885	Bombay Presidency Association formed	Coordinates western Indian leaders before the first Congress session.
28–31 Dec. 1885	First Indian National Congress session	Seventy-two delegates meet under W.C. Bonnerjee at Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College.
1886	Second Congress session at Kolkata	Indian National Conference merges into the broader Congress platform.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1887	Badruddin Tyabji presides at Chennai (Madras)	Reinforces a formally secular, cross-community national organization.
1888	Dufferin attacks Congress as a “microscopic minority”	Marks official movement from cautious observation to organized hostility.
1892	Indian Councils Act	Concedes limited discussion and indirect representation while preserving official control.
1905	Partition of Bengal begins a new phase	Moderate politics faces the test of boycott, swadeshi and wider mobilization.

High-confusion comparisons

Pair	First term	Second term	Decisive distinction
Indian Association vs Indian National Congress	Founded 1876 in Kolkata by Banerjea and Bose; activist provincial base	Founded 1885 as recurring all-India platform	The former prepared campaigns and conferences; the latter institutionalized national coordination.
Indian National Conference vs Congress	Met in Kolkata in 1883 and 1885	First met in Mumbai in 1885	Conference was an immediate precursor and merged into Congress activity in 1886.

Pair	First term	Second term	Decisive distinction
Safety valve vs lightning conductor	Congress allegedly created to release and neutralize unrest	Hume used protectively by an already developing Indian movement	Creation by colonial design differs from tactical use of an intermediary.
Moderate vs loyalist	Criticized colonial policy while using constitutional methods	Defended imperial rule or placed loyalty above national demands	Moderate language of loyalty did not cancel structural criticism.
Nomination vs election under 1892 Act	Government formally nominated members	Bodies recommended candidates through an indirect process	The statute avoided the word "election" and preserved official control.
Petition as plea vs petition as politics	Private appeal for favour	Publicly researched claim used to organize opinion	Moderate petitions belonged to a wider repertoire, though leverage remained weak.

Dimension	Moderate strength	Moderate limitation
Social base	Cohesive educated networks across presidencies	Urban, high-status and male overrepresentation
Method	Evidence, annual sessions, press and legislative scrutiny	Little sustained vil-lage or workplace organization
Ideology	Economic critique and civil equality	Excessive hope in British liberal response
Organization	Durable all-India secular platform	Leadership did not mirror India's social composition
Reform gain	Indian Councils Act 1892 opened limited discussion	No responsible government, budget control or direct election

Self-test

1. What converted colonial administrative unification into a basis for nationalism?
2. How did the early associations of 1836–52 contribute to later politics, and what was their main limit?
3. Why were the East India Association and Poona Sarvajanik Sabha important?
4. Name four pre-1885 campaigns that created all-India political experience.
5. Why was the Ilbert Bill controversy a turning point?
6. State the date, venue, president and delegate count of the first Congress session.
7. Distinguish the Indian National Conference from the Indian National Congress.
8. What is the difference between the safety-valve and lightning-conductor interpretations?
9. Describe the Moderate social base without reducing it to a single class.
10. What were the principal Moderate methods and what purpose did they serve?
11. Give three achievements and three limitations of Moderate nationalism.
12. How did the government respond to Congress between 1885 and 1905?

Answer key

1. Shared administration and communications became nationalist when economic exploitation, racial exclusion and political subordination were recognized as common Indian grievances.
2. They introduced meetings, memorials, information gathering and constitutional petition; their chief limit was a narrow provincial and elite, often landed, membership.
3. The East India Association presented Indian claims in Britain, while Poona Sarvajanik Sabha developed public representation and investigation in western India.

4. The ICS-age campaign, opposition to the Vernacular Press Act, opposition to the Arms Act and the Ilbert Bill agitation; Afghan War expenditure and plantation labour were additional issues.
5. European racial agitation defeated equal judicial authority and showed educated Indians that proclaimed British liberalism yielded to white privilege.
6. It met on 28–31 December 1885 at Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, Mumbai, under W.C. Bonnerjee, with seventy-two delegates.
7. The National Conference met in Kolkata in 1883 and 1885 as an immediate precursor; Congress began in Mumbai in 1885 and became the durable all-India annual body.
8. Safety valve claims colonial officials created Congress to contain revolt; lightning conductor means Indian leaders used Hume tactically to protect an independently developing movement.
9. It consisted mainly of English-educated urban lawyers, journalists, teachers, merchants and professionals, with high-status overrepresentation but no simple control by one capitalist class.
10. Resolutions, petitions, meetings, newspapers, councils and British deputations investigated policy, coordinated demands, publicized colonial contradictions and trained national opinion.
11. Achievements: an all-India platform, economic anti-imperialism and a civil-liberties vocabulary. Limits: narrow reach, little direct peasant-worker participation and excessive reliance on British liberal response.
12. It moved from cautious observation to ridicule and hostility, discouraged official support, cultivated princes and communal counterweights, used surveillance and restrictive law, and offered tightly limited council reform.

Closing perspective

Congress arose from a long associational sequence, not a single meeting or one retired official's initiative. Colonial unification became nationalist only when common structures were understood as producing common exploitation and discrimination.

Economic Nationalism and the Colonial Critique

Dadabhai Naoroji developed the drain argument from the 1860s and presented it systematically in *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901).

Drain meant a unilateral transfer abroad without an equivalent economic return to India, not every payment made to Britain.

From grievance to a theory of colonialism

Early associations protested particular taxes, expenditure and racial exclusions. Economic nationalists took the next step: they showed how apparently separate policies formed a system. India exported goods, paid taxes and hosted railways, yet remained poor because the commanding decisions and much of the surplus lay outside the country.

Their method was modern and public. They read budgets, trade returns, salary lists, parliamentary papers and famine reports; estimated income; compared Indian expenditure with other countries; and translated statistical arguments into speeches and newspaper articles. Their calculations were often constrained by weak data, but official statistics could now be turned against official claims.

The critique rejected two explanations. First, poverty was not simply the survival of precolonial backwardness. Second, infrastructure and law did not prove that rule was economically beneficial. A railway could increase mobility and still be financed

and routed to privilege imperial trade; administrative order could coexist with a net transfer of resources.

Drain theory: definition and mechanism

The drain was the transfer of Indian income or export surplus abroad without an equivalent current return that enlarged Indian productive capacity or consumption. The word **unrequited** is essential. An ordinary import is paid for with an export and delivers a commodity; a drain payment settles a political, administrative or financial claim generated by foreign rule.

Principal channels

- **Home Charges:** India Office expenses, pensions, furlough allowances, debt service, military stores and other sterling obligations paid in Britain.
- **Official remittances:** savings and family transfers of highly paid European civil and military personnel.
- **Pensions and leave salaries:** income earned from Indian revenues but spent after officials left India.
- **Interest and guaranteed returns:** payments on public debt raised abroad and on guaranteed railway capital.
- **Private profits:** dividends and profits of British plantations, trading houses, banks, mines and managing agencies remitted abroad.
- **Imperial defence charges:** expenditure assigned to India for wars or strategic commitments serving wider imperial purposes.
- **Revenue-financed exports:** taxes were used to buy export goods; sterling receipts in London met external obligations rather than returning as payment to producers.

Council Bills helped operate the mechanism. Importers in Britain could buy bills from the India Office and redeem them in rupees in India. Sterling stayed in London to meet Home Charges; the Government of India paid rupees from revenue.

The system efficiently settled imperial accounts, but nationalists argued that it concealed a real transfer behind balanced trade figures.

Why estimates differed

Naoroji's estimates changed as information and categories changed. Other writers counted different proportions of private remittances, commercial profit, military costs or interest. National income itself was difficult to calculate. A defensible answer therefore avoids presenting one timeless annual figure. The analytical test is whether the payment arose from foreign political control and whether India received a commensurate economic benefit.

Critics objected that India obtained administration, security, railways and access to capital. Nationalists answered that service valuation could not be set unilaterally by the governing power, foreign personnel were unnecessarily expensive, and guaranteed capital transferred risk to Indians. Some external borrowing financed assets, so not every interest payment was pure loss. The debate concerns terms, control, opportunity cost and distribution, not a denial that any physical asset existed.

Naoroji: poverty, drain and moral contradiction

Dadabhai Naoroji combined statistical reasoning with a liberal moral argument. His early income estimates suggested extraordinarily low average living standards. The precise numbers were provisional; their purpose was to refute complacent claims of prosperity. Famine, low consumption and weak purchasing power corroborated the broader diagnosis.

Naoroji distinguished a potentially beneficial British connection from destructive foreign rule. If administration were Indianized, expenditure restrained and resources retained, political association might once have been reformed. But the continu-

ous drain made rule “un-British” by violating Britain’s declared principles of justice and representation.

His demands followed from the mechanism:

- simultaneous civil-service examinations and Indianization of higher posts;
- reduction of Home Charges and military expenditure;
- fair allocation of imperial costs between Britain and India;
- representative institutions controlling taxation and expenditure;
- industrial development and retention of capital in India.

By 1906, Naoroji publicly placed *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, boycott and national education within one programme. Economic reasoning had moved from requesting economy to demanding political control.

R.C. Dutt: agrarian structure and famine

Romesh Chandra Dutt treated colonial economic change historically. Permanent, ryotwari and mahalwari settlements differed in legal form, but heavy assessments, periodic enhancement, landlord power and indebtedness placed cultivators under pressure. Commercialization exposed households to price movements without providing irrigation, credit and security on adequate terms.

Dutt did not reduce famine to rainfall. Drought became catastrophe when poverty destroyed reserves, revenue claims remained rigid, purchasing power collapsed and relief was delayed or narrow. Grain could move through markets while hungry people lacked command over it. He favoured moderate, stable land revenue, irrigation, protection of cultivators and greater Indian control over expenditure.

His reconstruction sometimes generalised across very different regions and periods. Even so, it decisively relocated famine from providence to political economy. The issue became not whether rain failed, but why a governed society allowed harvest

shock to become mass mortality.

Ranade and the industrial question

Mahadev Govind Ranade shared the critique of poverty but placed special emphasis on constructive industrialization. He rejected the idea that laissez-faire would allow a capital-poor colony to catch an established industrial power. India needed modern banking, joint-stock enterprise, technical knowledge, transport, irrigation, state assistance and diversified occupations.

Ranade's position was not isolation. Foreign capital could contribute when it enlarged productive capacity on fair terms and did not monopolise control. The central problem was dependence: British capital, banks, shipping and managing agencies occupied strategic positions, while Indian enterprise faced weak credit and discriminatory policy.

This strand prevents economic nationalism from being reduced to drain accounting. Its positive programme sought productive employment, indigenous capital formation and an active developmental state.

Deindustrialization and unequal trade

Nationalists argued that Company coercion and nineteenth-century free-trade policy ruined handicrafts while failing to foster replacement industry. British mechanized textiles entered India; Indian goods faced earlier tariff barriers abroad; courtly demand declined; railways carried imported manufactures inland; and artisans lacked comparable credit or state support.

The strongest modern formulation is qualified. Hand spinning contracted severely and many weaving centres lost employment, but handloom weaving did not disappear everywhere. Some weavers adopted mill yarn, shifted to finer, regional or ceremonial products, and survived. Quantitative evidence differs by

region. The nationalist insight remains powerful: structural policy and unequal industrial capacity caused displacement, while modern factories grew too late and narrowly to absorb labour.

Railways and foreign capital

Economic nationalists did not have to deny every benefit of railways. Their criticism centred on design and finance:

- early lines linked ports, raw-material zones and military centres;
- the guarantee system assured British investors a return from Indian revenues;
- capital goods, engineering contracts and senior employment often came from Britain;
- freight policy could favour export commodities and imported manufactures;
- profits and interest created external payments.

Railways nevertheless integrated markets, reduced some transport costs, aided migration and later served Indian industry and nationalist organisation. The balanced judgement is that a transformative technology was embedded in an imperial financial and strategic structure.

Taxation, expenditure and the peasant

Drain analysis became politically effective when connected to familiar burdens. Nationalists demanded reduced land revenue, abolition or reduction of the salt tax, and restraint in military expenditure. They opposed charging India for Afghan campaigns and other imperial commitments. Budget speeches contrasted expenditure on the army and European officials with low spending on irrigation, sanitation and education.

They also demanded Indianization. This would lower salary and pension remittances, open careers and make administration

more responsive. Economic, political and moral arguments reinforced each other.

The early critique had limits. Leadership came mainly from educated and propertied groups; many proposals assumed industrial capitalist development would benefit the nation as a whole. Agrarian class conflict, wages and landlessness received uneven attention. Yet the critique made peasant taxation and famine national political questions rather than isolated local distress.

Swadeshi before 1905

Swadeshi logically followed the diagnosis that foreign trade and policy weakened Indian capital. Consumers could retain demand inside India by purchasing indigenous goods; entrepreneurs could build mills, banks, insurance firms and technical institutions; government could assist through tariffs and procurement.

The idea appeared before the Bengal agitation. Public burning of foreign cloth occurred in Maharashtra in 1896 amid criticism of cotton policy. What changed in 1905 was scale and political meaning: consumption became organised boycott, economic self-help became resistance, and support for indigenous industry became a test of national commitment.

Political education as the decisive achievement

Moderate leaders petitioned councils, commissions and Parliament because many still expected British liberal opinion to correct injustice. But their campaigns did more than seek official replies. Annual Congress sessions, newspapers, lectures and associations taught a common vocabulary: drain, Home Charges, Indianization, tariff protection, fiscal autonomy and swadeshi.

This vocabulary performed three political tasks:

1. **Causal:** it explained poverty as a consequence of power rather than fate.
2. **National:** it joined regional and occupational grievances within an all-India fiscal structure.
3. **Programmatic:** it made representative government necessary for economic development.

When repeated petitions failed, the analysis survived while faith in gradual imperial reform weakened. Militant nationalism inherited the Moderates' economic critique and changed the method from persuasion towards boycott, passive resistance and mass mobilisation.

Interpretations and debates

How robust was drain theory?

The structural claim is stronger than any single total. Foreign rule created compulsory sterling obligations, expatriate remittances and revenue-financed transfers outside Indian control. Dispute remains over which payments were unrequited: rail interest might finance an asset; administrative salaries might purchase a service; private profit differs from taxation. A balanced answer evaluates control, cost, reinvestment and opportunity rather than either counting every remittance as loss or dismissing the entire mechanism.

Nationalist estimate and modern national accounting

Naoroji pioneered income estimation with fragmentary data. His figures cannot be treated like later national accounts, but methodological imperfection does not invalidate the observed low consumption and fiscal transfer. His historical importance lies in asking distributive questions official aggregates avoided: who financed the state, who controlled the surplus and where income was spent.

Deindustrialization debate

Nationalist writers described a broad ruin of handicrafts.

Morris D. Morris later warned against assuming uniform collapse from inadequate occupational data. Amiya Kumar Bagchi found strong evidence of manufacturing decline in parts of Bihar, while Tirthankar Roy emphasises craft adaptation and productivity in surviving sectors. Consensus is safest at the level of mechanism and uneven outcome: severe decline in spinning and many local industries, survival and reorganisation elsewhere, and insufficient factory absorption.

Was economic nationalism bourgeois?

Marxist interpretations stress that tariff protection and swadeshi served emerging Indian capitalists. That interest was real, but the programme also challenged land revenue, salt taxation, famine policy, military expenditure and racial exclusion. Its social leadership was narrow; its political language could nevertheless travel beyond that class and expose the colonial structure.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1840s	Early Indian criticism of discriminatory trade and administration	Anticipates later systematic economic nationalism.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1866	Naoroji founds East India Association in London	Creates a platform for presenting India's economic case to British opinion.
1867	Naoroji presents "England's Debt to India"	Gives an early systematic formulation of external appropriation and moral obligation.
1870	Poona Sarvajanik Sabha founded	Becomes a centre of budget analysis, agrarian inquiry and economic criticism.
1875–76	Deccan agrarian distress and riots	Reinforce concern with revenue, debt and rural vulnerability.
1876	Indian Association founded	Helps nationalise demands over taxation, civil service and representation.
1876–78	Great famine	Makes the relationship among poverty, revenue and public policy impossible to treat as a temporary anomaly.
1878–80	Second Afghan War financed from Indian revenues	Demonstrates the nationalist charge that imperial military policy burdened Indian taxpayers.
1881	Naoroji describes foreign rule as an increasing economic invasion	Sharpens the claim that poverty is systemic rather than accidental.
1885	Indian National Congress founded	Gives economic resolutions and budget criticism an annual all-India platform.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1886	Naoroji publishes <i>Poverty of India</i>	Connects low income estimates to the drain and colonial fiscal policy.
1892	Naoroji elected to the British House of Commons	Gives Indian economic criticism a parliamentary voice.
1893	Royal Commission on Indian Expenditure appointed	Responds to sustained pressure over fiscal relations and military charges.
1895–97	Welby Commission takes evidence	Naoroji and other witnesses contest allocation of imperial expenditure to India.
1896	Countervailing excise imposed on Indian cotton cloth	Becomes a symbol of policy favouring Lancashire over Indian mills.
1896–1900	Severe famines and epidemics	Intensify criticism of poverty, revenue rigidity, export orientation and inadequate relief.
1901	Naoroji's <i>Poverty and Un-British Rule in India</i> published	Consolidates decades of drain analysis.
1902–04	R.C. Dutt's <i>Economic History of India</i> volumes published	Integrate land systems, trade, industry and famine into a historical critique.
1905	Swadeshi movement begins after Bengal's partition	Converts economic nationalism into boycott, indigenous enterprise and mass political action.

High-confusion comparisons

Pair	Core difference	Why confusion matters
Drain vs ordinary import payment	Unrequited political-financial transfer vs exchange for a commodity	Not every external payment was drain.
Home Charges vs private remittances	Official sterling obligations vs personal or corporate transfers	Both moved income abroad through different institutions.
Naoroji vs R.C. Dutt	External transfer and poverty vs agrarian history and famine	Their analyses overlap but have different centres of gravity.
Naoroji vs Ranade	Drain and Indianization vs industrial capability and state support	Economic nationalism contained diagnosis and development strategy.
Free trade vs fair competition	Formal absence of tariffs vs competition between unequal industrial structures	Equal rules can reproduce unequal capacity.
Foreign capital vs drain	Investment that may create assets vs return and profit under unequal terms	Nationalists differed over conditions, not merely nationality of capital.
Railway benefit vs railway finance	Mobility and integration vs guarantee, routing and external payments	A technology can transform India while serving imperial priorities.
Economic critique vs economic boycott	Explanation and reform demands vs direct pressure through consumption	The first prepared the ideology of the second.

Self-test

1. Define drain in one sentence and distinguish it from an import payment.
2. Name five principal channels of drain.
3. What role did Council Bills play in settling colonial financial obligations?

4. Why should a drain estimate be presented as a range or method-dependent calculation?
5. Compare the main emphases of Naoroji, R.C. Dutt and Ranade.
6. Why did Indianization of services form part of economic nationalism?
7. How did nationalists connect land revenue to famine vulnerability?
8. Give two criticisms and two acknowledged benefits of railways.
9. Why was the cotton excise of 1896 politically important?
10. State the strongest balanced conclusion in the deindustrialization debate.
11. How did Moderate petitions function as political education?
12. Why did economic nationalism point towards swaraj?

Answer key

1. Drain was an external transfer without equivalent current return to India; an import payment purchases a commodity of corresponding value.
2. Home Charges, official remittances, pensions, debt interest, railway guarantees, repatriated profits, imperial military costs or revenue-financed exports; any five.
3. Sterling paid for bills remained in London for Home Charges, while the Government of India redeemed them in rupees from Indian revenues.
4. Categories, years, service valuation, income data and treatment of investment returns differed among calculations.
5. Naoroji centred drain and poverty; Dutt agrarian policy and famine; Ranade industrial development, banking and state support.
6. It reduced expensive European salaries and overseas pensions, retained income, opened careers and could make administration more responsive.
7. Heavy or rigid assessments reduced reserves, deepened debt and continued during harvest failure, turning scarcity into entitlement collapse.

8. Criticisms: guaranteed returns and port-military routing. Benefits: cheaper mobility, market integration, migration or later industrial and political use.
9. Pairing import duty with excise on Indian cloth appeared to neutralise protection and subordinate Indian fiscal policy to Lancashire.
10. Severe decline affected spinning and many craft regions, adaptation preserved others, and modern factory growth did not absorb displaced labour adequately.
11. Budgets, resolutions, newspapers and meetings taught common concepts and joined local burdens into an all-India explanation.
12. If foreign control determined expenditure, trade and surplus transfer, durable development required Indian control of government.

Closing perspective

The point of Economic Nationalism and the Colonial Critique is not a date list. It is an explanation of how institutions, interests, and political choices changed the field for what followed.

Swadeshi, Boycott, Militant Nationalism, and the Muslim League

Curzon's government announced Bengal's partition on 19 July 1905 and implemented it on 16 October.

The new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam had Dhaka as capital; western Bengal was joined administratively with Bihar and Orissa.

Why Curzon partitioned Bengal

The Bengal Presidency was indeed very large, and administrative reorganisation was not inherently unreasonable. Yet the chosen boundaries reveal political calculation. The plan separated eastern Bengali-majority districts from the western centre of Bengali public life and joined western Bengal to Bihar and Orissa. Officials discussed weakening Calcutta's political influence and presented Eastern Bengal as a province where Muslim landed interests could gain prominence.

The final arrangement created **Eastern Bengal and Assam**, with Dhaka as capital, and a western province containing Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It divided Bengali-speaking populations while joining regions with different languages. Nationalists therefore treated administrative convenience as a cover for "divide and rule."

The communal effect was not mechanically predetermined. Many eastern Bengali Muslims initially welcomed Dhaka's provincial status, educational possibilities and relief from Calcutta-centred Hindu bhadralok dominance. Some Muslims joined anti-partition activity; some Hindu landlords and professionals also defended interests threatened by reorganisation. Political responses reflected class, region, patronage and access as well as religion.

From petition to boycott

Between 1903 and mid-1905, opposition relied on petitions, press campaigns and public meetings. Their failure discredited the assumption that informed constitutional protest would reverse policy. At the Town Hall on 7 August 1905, leaders endorsed boycott of foreign goods. When partition took effect on 16 October, people observed mourning, fasted, bathed in the Ganga and tied rakhis as symbols of unity. Tagore's songs and processions gave the protest an emotional language.

Boycott changed the relationship between participant and state. A petition asked authority to act; boycott asked people to act through daily choices. Refusing Manchester cloth made consumption political, imposed economic pressure and cultivated self-discipline.

The four-part programme

Swadeshi

Swadeshi encouraged purchase and manufacture of Indian goods. Textile mills, handloom production, soap, matches, banks, insurance companies, shipping ventures and small enterprises received new attention. Prafulla Chandra Ray's Bengal Chemical enterprise became an emblem of indigenous technical capability.

Results were uneven. Demand rose for some Indian products, and the movement dignified entrepreneurship. Many goods were costlier or unavailable; poor consumers could not always sacrifice price for politics; mills did not automatically share gains with labour. Economic self-reliance was a political school more than an immediate substitute for the colonial economy.

Boycott

The initial target was foreign cloth and other imported goods. Pickets urged customers not to enter shops, public bonfires dramatised rejection, and social pressure enforced compliance. Militants wanted to extend boycott to government schools, courts, councils, titles and employment. Moderates generally restricted it to Bengal and to foreign goods, fearing coercion, illegality and premature confrontation.

Boycott was both negative and constructive: withdrawing from an institution required an alternative. Without national schools, arbitration or indigenous production, refusal could not be sustained.

National education

Students were central participants, and official circulars threatened scholarships, grants and disciplinary action against political activity. Nationalists established institutions intended to combine modern technical learning with patriotic purpose. The National Council of Education and Bengal National College emerged in 1906; Aurobindo Ghose served as the college's first principal.

National education challenged cultural control but struggled with finance, recognised credentials, trained teachers and employment. Families who depended on degrees could not easily leave official institutions. Its enduring significance lay in making curriculum and institutional control political questions.

Passive resistance and constructive organisation

Militant thinkers proposed organised non-cooperation with unjust authority: boycott courts and schools, refuse selected cooperation, create arbitration tribunals and build disciplined volunteer bodies. This “passive resistance” was more confrontational than Moderate petition but not identical to Gandhi’s later satyagraha, which developed a more systematic ethical discipline, mass technique and central leadership.

Samitis such as Ashwini Kumar Dutt’s Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in Barisal combined propaganda, arbitration, relief, physical training and local branches. Their density made eastern Bengal important to mobilisation. Some later revolutionary recruitment passed through similar networks, but open Swadeshi mobilisation and secret armed action must not be collapsed into one category.

Social and regional spread

Students organised picketing, processions and propaganda despite official penalties. Women participated in meetings, household production, fundraising and rejection of foreign goods, moving nationalist practice into domestic space. Traders and professionals funded activity; workers joined some strikes; artisans benefited from indigenous demand.

Peasant participation varied. Ashwini Kumar Dutt’s Barisal network reached rural areas, and appeals sometimes used village fairs and religious gatherings. Yet the movement did not create a durable, all-Bengal agrarian programme around rent, debt or land. High prices of swadeshi goods and elite leadership limited poorer participation.

Outside Bengal:

- **Maharashtra:** Tilak connected boycott to earlier festival mobilisation, famine politics and assertive nationalism.
- **Punjab:** Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh joined political radicalism to canal-colony and agrarian grievances in 1907.

- **Madras Presidency:** V.O. Chidambaram Pillai's Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company challenged British commercial dominance at Tuticorin; Subramania Bharati spread militant ideas through Tamil writing.
- **Delhi and United Provinces:** meetings, student politics and swadeshi associations carried the movement into northern urban centres.

The uneven spread matters. Swadeshi created all-India resonance, but its strongest sustained organisation remained regional.

Militant nationalism: ideas and leaders

Militant nationalism, then commonly called Extremism, emerged from disappointment with Moderate methods, not from absence of earlier political education. Economic critique, famine, racial arrogance, repressive laws and Curzon's policies convinced younger nationalists that British interests were structurally opposed to Indian development. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 and Ethiopia's victory over Italy in 1896 weakened myths of European invincibility.

The major leaders are often remembered as **Lal-Bal-Pal**:

- **Lala Lajpat Rai** in Punjab;
- **Bal Gangadhar Tilak** in Maharashtra;
- **Bipin Chandra Pal** in Bengal.

Aurobindo Ghose gave passive resistance an influential theoretical formulation. Their shared themes were swaraj, self-reliance, sacrifice, boycott and distrust of official benevolence. They did not form a single disciplined party and differed over tactics, timing and religious symbolism.

Militants argued that freedom required capacity built through struggle. Rights were not gifts secured by better petitions. Tilak's festivals, Pal's lectures, Aurobindo's journalism and local samitis sought courage and organised will.

Congress from Benares to Calcutta

At Benares in 1905, Congress supported Swadeshi and the boycott undertaken in Bengal, but Gokhale and other Moderates resisted making boycott a general political weapon. Militants wanted an all-India programme and stronger commitment to swaraj.

The Calcutta session of 1906 temporarily bridged the divide. Dadabhai Naoroji, acceptable to both groups, presided. Resolutions endorsed:

- swaraj, understood with deliberate ambiguity;
- swadeshi;
- boycott;
- national education.

Moderates could read swaraj as self-government like the settler colonies and boycott as a specific Bengal measure. Militants read them as a programme of national struggle. The compromise postponed rather than resolved conflict.

Surat split, 1907

The 1907 session was shifted from Nagpur to Surat, where Moderate organisers were stronger. Dispute centred on the presidency and whether the 1906 programme would be reaffirmed. Militants opposed the Moderate candidate Rash Behari Ghosh and favoured a leader associated with the assertive wing, initially Lajpat Rai. Procedural mistrust, packed delegates and physical disorder broke up the session before normal business.

The split was not merely a quarrel of personalities. It reflected disagreements over:

- constitutional agitation versus boycott and passive resistance;
- control of Congress committees and credentials;
- pace of mobilisation and relationship to the masses;
- whether unity required ambiguity or a binding programme.

The result weakened both sides. Moderates retained formal Congress machinery but lost popular energy; militants lacked an all-India organisation capable of coordinating sustained struggle.

Repression, revolutionary turn and decline

Government combined selective concession with coercion. Meetings were restricted, schools threatened, newspapers prosecuted, samitis banned and leaders deported without trial. Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh were deported in 1907. Tilak was convicted of sedition in 1908 and sent to Mandalay for six years. The 1908 and 1910 press laws attacked militant publication financially and legally.

Some young activists concluded that spectacular violence could awaken the nation and punish officials. The Muzaffarpur bomb attack of April 1908 killed two British women instead of the intended magistrate Kingsford. The Alipore conspiracy case followed; Aurobindo was acquitted, while others were convicted. Secret revolutionary nationalism grew partly from the frustration of open politics, but it had distinct organisation and methods.

By 1908–09 the open movement declined because:

- repression removed leaders and disrupted associations;
- the Congress split eliminated a national coordinating forum;
- boycott fatigue and the cost or shortage of alternatives reduced adherence;
- there was no sustained programme for peasant and worker demands;
- Moderate and militant leaders failed to negotiate an organisational settlement;
- some activists moved into secret action while others withdrew.

Decline did not mean failure. Swadeshi normalised boycott, national education, indigenous enterprise, volunteer organisa-

tion and cultural mobilisation. Later mass movements inherited this repertoire.

Muslim political responses and the Simla Deputation

Muslim opinion was diverse. In eastern Bengal, many Muslim landlords and professionals welcomed a Muslim-majority province centred on Dhaka, expecting offices and education. Others opposed partition or participated in *swadeshi*. Hindu revivalist idioms and occasional coercive boycott could alienate Muslim peasants and traders, but official patronage and pre-existing competition over employment and representation were also crucial.

On 1 October 1906, a deputation led by Aga Khan met Viceroy Minto at Simla. It sought separate Muslim representation in councils and weight beyond numerical population, justified by political importance and imperial service. The initiative emerged through Aligarh-linked elites and official encouragement. Minto's sympathetic response helped establish communal representation as a constitutional principle.

Formation and early aims of the Muslim League

The All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference met at Dhaka in December 1906. On 30 December, leaders including Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka, Viqar-ul-Mulk and Aga Khan helped establish the All-India Muslim League. Its early objectives were to:

- promote loyalty to the British government;
- protect and advance Muslim political rights and interests;
- prevent hostility towards other communities, so far as consistent with the first two aims.

The League initially represented a narrow elite of landlords, titled notables and educated professionals. It was neither instantly separatist nor representative of all Muslims. Its creation gave all-India organisational form to a politics of community safeguards. In 1913 it adopted self-government under the Crown as an aim, showing that its trajectory was not fixed in 1906.

Morley-Minto reforms and separate electorates

The Indian Councils Act of 1909 enlarged central and provincial legislative councils, permitted more discussion and questions, and admitted an Indian, S.P. Sinha, to the Viceroy's Executive Council. It did not create executive responsibility to elected representatives; official control at the centre remained.

Separate electorates meant Muslim voters elected Muslim representatives in designated constituencies. This was more than reserved seats in a common electorate. It encouraged candidates to appeal to a legally defined religious constituency and made communal identity part of constitutional competition. Supporters saw protection against majority domination; critics saw a state-designed division of the national electorate.

Annulment and reorganisation, 1911

At the Delhi Durbar in December 1911, the Crown announced annulment of Bengal's partition. Bengal was reunited as a Bengali-speaking province; Bihar and Orissa formed a separate province, and Assam again became a separate chief commissionership. The imperial capital moved from Calcutta to Delhi.

The reversal demonstrated the force of sustained agitation, but it was not a return to 1904. Calcutta lost capital status, Bihar and Orissa remained separated, separate electorates continued, and political relations had been transformed. Many Muslims who had invested hopes in Eastern Bengal felt betrayed. A tactical

nationalist victory therefore carried new communal and regional consequences.

Interpretations and debates

Administrative reform or divide and rule?

Bengal's size presented an administrative problem, but it does not explain the selected linguistic boundaries or official desire to weaken Calcutta politics. Political division and cultivation of provincial Muslim support were integral to implementation. Administrative need and political motive can coexist; the latter explains why this plan, rather than a linguistically coherent alternative, provoked such opposition.

Was Swadeshi a mass movement?

It moved far beyond elite petitions through students, women, traders, artisans, rural samitis and regional campaigns. Yet participation was uneven, the poorest faced consumption constraints, and a durable peasant programme remained weak. It was a major popular mobilisation and precursor to mass nationalism, not yet a uniformly mass all-India movement.

Religious symbolism: resource or limitation?

Festivals, vows, mother-goddess imagery and songs made sacrifice emotionally intelligible and used familiar cultural forms. Hindu-coded symbolism could also narrow Muslim identification and allow opponents to depict nationalism as communal. Tagore's rakhi initiative sought an inclusive territorial bond, showing that cultural mobilisation was contested rather than uniformly exclusionary.

Moderate versus militant achievement

Moderates developed economic critique, associations and all-India public opinion; militants expanded goals and methods towards self-reliance and direct action. Moderates underestimated structural resistance, while militants lacked durable organisation and sometimes substituted inspiration for strategy. Swadeshi was strongest when constitutional legitimacy, constructive work and popular pressure reinforced one another.

League formation and inevitability

The League did not make Partition of India inevitable. In 1906 it represented limited elite interests, professed loyalty and sought safeguards inside the empire. Separate electorates, provincial competition, official strategy and later political conflicts shaped its development. Retrospective inevitability erases Muslim diversity and later periods of Congress-League cooperation.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1893–95	Tilak popularises Ganapati and Shivaji festivals	Demonstrates a militant style of public mobilisation before Swadeshi.
1896–97	Famine, plague measures, cloth burning and Tilak’s imprisonment	Economic grievance and coercion weaken confidence in constitutional reform.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1899–1905	Curzon's viceroyalty	University control, municipal change, secrecy law and racial arrogance sharpen nationalist opposition.
Dec 1903	Partition plan publicly discussed	Begins organised protest before the final territorial scheme.
19 Jul 1905	Final partition decision announced	Converts constitutional protest into a movement for boycott.
7 Aug 1905	Calcutta Town Hall meeting	Formally endorses boycott of foreign goods.
16 Oct 1905	Partition takes effect	Observed through mourning, fasting, bathing, rakhi and mass meetings; movement enters popular phase.
Dec 1905	Benares Congress under Gokhale	Supports Swadeshi and Bengal boycott but remains cautious about wider boycott.
Apr 1906	Barisal Conference broken up by police	Repression strengthens the militant case against reliance on lawful meetings alone.
1 Oct 1906	Simla Deputation meets Minto	Elite Muslim leaders seek separate electorates and weighted representation.
Dec 1906	Calcutta Congress under Naoroji	Adopts swaraj, swadeshi, boycott and national education through a negotiated formula.

Date	Event	Why it matters
30 Dec 1906	All-India Muslim League founded at Dhaka	Establishes an all-India Muslim political organisation.
1907	Punjab agitation; Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh deported	Shows militant politics and agrarian grievance spreading beyond Bengal.
Dec 1907	Surat Congress breaks up	Organisational conflict produces the Moderate-militant split.
Apr–May 1908	Muzaffarpur bombing and arrests in Alipore case	Revolutionary action and state repression intensify after mass agitation weakens.
Jul 1908	Tilak convicted of sedition	Six-year transportation to Mandalay removes the most influential militant leader.
1908	Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act	Targets publications linked to revolutionary advocacy.
1909	Indian Councils Act; Aurobindo acquitted in Alipore case	Separate electorates institutionalised; Aurobindo soon withdraws from active politics.
1910	Indian Press Act	Securities and forfeiture further restrict nationalist journalism.
1911	Bengal partition annulled; capital transferred to Delhi	Anti-partition demand succeeds, but territorial reorganisation and communal representation endure.

High-confusion comparisons

Pair	Core distinction	Memory test
Swadeshi vs boycott	Positive indigenous production/use vs refusal of foreign goods or institutions	Build versus withdraw.
Moderate vs militant	Constitutional persuasion vs self-reliance, boycott and passive resistance	Different methods, overlapping economic critique.
Militant vs revolutionary	Open mass pressure vs secret armed action	Tilak-Pal politics was not identical to bomb conspiracies.
Bengal partition vs annulment	Eastern Bengal created in 1905 vs re-union in 1911	Annulment still separated Bihar-Orissa and Assam.
Benares 1905 vs Calcutta 1906	Limited support for Bengal boycott vs four-part negotiated programme	Caution then compromise.
Calcutta 1906 vs Surat 1907	Temporary factional unity vs organisational rupture	Resolution ambiguity could not settle control.
Simla Deputation vs Muslim League	Delegation demanding representation vs continuing political organisation	1 October versus 30 December 1906.
Reserved seat vs separate electorate	Guaranteed seat may use common voters vs community voters elect community representative	1909 established the latter for Muslims.
Anti-partition success vs full reversal	Annulment of 1905 province vs restoration of old Bengal Presidency	Capital and provincial map still changed.

Self-test

1. When was Bengal's partition announced and when did it take effect?
2. Why is administrative convenience an insufficient explanation

of the partition?

3. Distinguish swadeshi, boycott and passive resistance.
4. Name four constructive institutions or activities of the movement.
5. Give two strengths and two social limits of Swadeshi mobilisation.
6. What four principles did the Calcutta Congress of 1906 endorse?
7. Identify three substantive causes of the Surat split.
8. Distinguish militant nationalism from revolutionary nationalism.
9. Give four reasons for decline after 1908.
10. What did the Simla Deputation demand?
11. What did separate electorates change in political representation?
12. Why was the 1911 annulment both a victory and an incomplete reversal?

Answer key

1. It was announced on 19 July 1905 and took effect on 16 October 1905.
2. The boundaries divided Bengali speakers, joined unlike linguistic regions and aligned with official efforts to weaken Calcutta nationalism and cultivate communal support.
3. Swadeshi built and used indigenous production; boycott refused foreign goods or institutions; passive resistance organised wider non-cooperation and alternatives.
4. National schools, arbitration courts, volunteer samitis, indigenous mills, banks, insurance, shipping, relief or village propaganda; any four.
5. Strengths: student/women's participation, cultural reach, rural samitis or regional spread. Limits: weak agrarian programme, costly alternatives, coercive picketing or uneven Muslim participation.
6. Swaraj, swadeshi, boycott and national education.
7. Constitutional versus direct methods, control of Congress

machinery, scope of boycott, pace of mobilisation and disputed presidency; any three.

8. Militants used open boycott, passive resistance and popular pressure; revolutionaries used secret organisations and targeted armed action.
9. Repression, imprisoned or deported leaders, Congress division, boycott fatigue, weak alternatives, limited peasant programme or revolutionary diversion; any four.
10. Separate Muslim electorates and political weight beyond numerical strength, justified by community importance and imperial service.
11. Designated Muslim voters elected Muslim representatives, making religious community the legal basis of electoral constituency.
12. Bengal was reunited under pressure, but Bihar-Orissa and Assam were separated, the capital moved to Delhi, and separate electorates remained.

Closing perspective

The point of Swadeshi, Boycott, Militant Nationalism, and the Muslim League is not a date list. It is an explanation of how institutions, interests, and political choices changed the field for what followed.

Revolutionary Nationalism, Home Rule, and War

Revolutionary nationalism grew after Swadeshi repression, the Surat split, leader arrests, and frustration with both petitions and passive resistance.

Bengal networks included Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar; Maharashtra's major organization was Abhinav Bharat.

Why revolutionary nationalism emerged

The Swadeshi movement widened political imagination but lost momentum after repression, organizational division, and the Surat split. The deportation or imprisonment of leaders, restrictions on newspapers, and closure of associations convinced some younger nationalists that open agitation could be neutralized. International examples - the Russian revolutionaries, Irish nationalism, Japanese victory over Russia, and anti-imperial movements elsewhere - suggested that a determined minority could challenge a powerful state.

The revolutionary current rejected individual advancement and cultivated sacrifice, secrecy, physical training, and armed preparation. It should not be equated with indiscriminate violence. Most groups selected officials, informers, or financial targets and hoped dramatic action would awaken political courage. Yet secrecy narrowed accountability, actions sometimes killed

unintended victims, and assassination could not substitute for durable mass organization.

Bengal: gymnasiums, societies, and conspiracy cases

Anushilan Samiti developed through physical-culture associations in Kolkata and eastern Bengal. Prominent figures included Pramathanath Mitra, Aurobindo Ghose, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Pulin Behari Das, and Jatindranath Mukherjee, known as Bagha Jatin. Jugantar was both a newspaper and a network associated with more militant action.

The 1908 attempt to kill Douglas Kingsford at Muzaffarpur mistakenly killed Mrs and Miss Kennedy. Khudiram Bose was captured and executed; Prafulla Chaki died before arrest. Police investigation uncovered the Maniktala garden and led to the Alipore case. The trial disrupted one network but turned defendants into symbols.

Later actions included political robberies to raise funds, attempts to obtain arms, and the 1912 bombing of Viceroy Hardinge during the Delhi state entry. Rashbehari Bose escaped and later reached Japan. Bagha Jatin's group pursued a German arms plan during the war; he died after a gunfight at Balasore in 1915.

Maharashtra, Punjab, and other regional strands

The Chapekar brothers' 1897 assassination of plague officials preceded the main period and provided a remembered model. V.D. Savarkar and Ganesh Savarkar organized Abhinav Bharat. Savarkar linked historical writing, arms acquisition, and India House activity before his arrest and transportation.

Punjab activism drew on agrarian unrest, military recruitment, migration, and racial discrimination abroad. Ajit Singh and the

Bharat Mata Society mobilized around colonization and canal-colony grievances in 1907. Later, Ghadar transformed migrant anger into an international republican programme.

Revolutionary activity also appeared in Bihar, the United Provinces, and princely territories. Networks overlapped through students, religious preachers, soldiers, printers, and railway routes, but no permanent national command united them.

Expatriate centres

Political freedom abroad allowed propaganda but exposed activists to surveillance and diplomatic pressure.

- **London:** Shyamji Krishna Varma founded India House and *The Indian Sociologist*. Savarkar organized students and circulated revolutionary history. Madan Lal Dhingra killed Curzon Wylie in 1909.
- **Paris:** Madame Bhikaji Cama, S.R. Rana, and others published and campaigned; Cama displayed an early nationalist flag at Stuttgart in 1907.
- **United States and Canada:** Taraknath Das, Lala Har Dayal, Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kartar Singh Sarabha, and migrant workers built the Ghadar movement.
- **Berlin and wartime Europe:** Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Chempakaraman Pillai, and colleagues formed the Indian Independence Committee, seeking German assistance.
- **Southeast and East Asia:** Indian soldiers, migrants, and merchants provided routes through Singapore, Bangkok, Shanghai, and Japan.

These networks internationalized Indian nationalism before global diplomacy became a regular Congress strategy.

Ghadar: migration, republicanism, and attempted revolt

Indian migrants on the Pacific coast, mostly Punjabi Sikh workers but also Hindus and Muslims, faced exclusion, racism, and restrictions on family migration. They concluded that Indians were humiliated abroad because India was subject at home. The Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast, commonly called the Ghadar Party, was formed in 1913 with Sohan Singh Bhakna as president and Lala Har Dayal as a leading intellectual. Its paper *Ghadar* used Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, and other languages.

Ghadar's ideology was secular, republican, internationalist, and openly insurrectionary. It attacked communal division and asked soldiers to turn their weapons against colonial rule.

The Komagata Maru, chartered by Gurdit Singh, sailed to Vancouver in 1914 with Indian passengers challenging Canada's continuous-journey rule. Entry was denied after a long confrontation. On return, police tried to control passengers at Budge Budge near Kolkata; violence and deaths followed. The incident confirmed the global racial structure of empire.

When war began, thousands of migrants returned to Punjab expecting rebellion. Leaders contacted cantonments and fixed an uprising for February 1915. British intelligence penetrated the organization; dates were exposed and altered; weapons and coordination were insufficient. Arrests and special tribunals produced executions, transportation, and imprisonment. Kartar Singh Sarabha was executed at nineteen.

The Singapore mutiny of 1915 showed wartime military volatility but was not controlled successfully by a single Ghadar command. German arms shipments, including the Annie Larsen-Maverick scheme, failed. The movement's operational defeat did not erase its ideological impact on later revolutionaries, soldiers, and overseas nationalism.

Wartime politics and repression

India contributed soldiers, taxes, loans, grain, raw materials, and war supplies. Prices rose sharply; essential goods became expensive; taxation and recruitment intensified; influenza devastated the population in 1918–19. Indian elites initially supported the war, expecting political concessions and believing loyalty would strengthen the claim to self-government.

The state answered conspiracy with the Defence of India Act 1915, special tribunals, internment, censorship, postal interception, deportation, and surveillance. Wartime emergency normalized executive power. The later Rowlatt committees proposed continuing extraordinary measures after peace.

Home Rule: open organization returns

Bal Gangadhar Tilak returned to active politics after release from Mandalay in 1914. He moderated old conflicts, sought reunion with Congress moderates, and began a Home Rule League in April 1916. Its territorial concentration allowed organized work through Maharashtra, Karnataka, Berar, and Central Provinces.

Annie Besant launched a wider league in September 1916, drawing on the Theosophical network, newspapers *New India* and *Commonweal*, students, lawyers, and urban professionals. George Arundale, B.P. Wadia, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, and others organized branches.

Home Rule meant self-government within the British Empire, analogous to dominion aspirations, not immediate complete independence. Leagues used lectures, pamphlets, petitions, libraries, study circles, vernacular speeches, and local branches. They revived political activity between annual Congress sessions and trained cadres later absorbed into Gandhian movements.

Limits were significant. Membership remained strongest among educated urban and small-town groups; peasants and workers were not independently mobilized on a comparable scale; organizational overlap caused friction; and Besant be-

came cautious after the 1917 declaration. Tilak's libel case and travel for the case against Valentine Chirol also drew him away.

Besant's internment in June 1917 triggered protest and increased her prestige. The government released her in September; she became Congress president in December.

Lucknow Pact: unity and future tension

The 1916 Congress session reunited moderates and the Tilak wing. Congress and the All-India Muslim League agreed on constitutional demands: larger elected majorities, greater Indian control, provincial autonomy, and reduced executive dominance.

Congress accepted separate electorates and agreed to Muslim representation above population share in provinces where Muslims were a minority, while Muslim representation was lower than population in Punjab and Bengal. The pact demonstrated interorganizational cooperation and strengthened pressure on government. It also constitutionalized community as a unit of representation and entrenched bargaining through fixed communal shares.

The pact was possible because League politics had changed under leaders including Muhammad Ali Jinnah, then celebrated as an ambassador of unity, and because annulment of Bengal partition, Balkan conflicts, and British policy alienated sections of Muslim opinion.

Montagu Declaration and reforms

Edwin Montagu announced on 20 August 1917 that British policy aimed at increasing Indian association and the gradual development of self-governing institutions toward responsible government in India as an integral part of the empire. This was the first official statement to name responsible government as a goal.

Every qualifying word mattered. Progress would be gradual; British authorities would judge timing; India would remain imperial; and no deadline was given. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report led to the Government of India Act 1919:

- provincial “transferred” subjects went to Indian ministers responsible to elected legislatures;
- “reserved” subjects remained with governors and executive councillors;
- the central legislature expanded but the executive remained unresponsive;
- franchises were narrow and separate electorates widened;
- the Secretary of State’s detailed control was modified but not removed.

Dyarchy divided provincial government into two chains, often leaving ministers with social responsibilities but inadequate finance. Reform conceded political space while protecting imperial power.

Why revolutionary efforts declined before 1919

Repression removed cadres; surveillance penetrated cells; arms were scarce; action lacked mass political integration; regional groups struggled to coordinate; and hoped-for military revolt failed. Home Rule offered an open alternative, and Gandhi soon provided a mass method that joined moral discipline to broad organization.

Revolutionary nationalism nevertheless survived. Its networks, martyr traditions, international contacts, secular sacrifice, and critique of imperial violence reappeared in the Hindustan Republican Association, Bhagat Singh’s generation, and later overseas formations.

Propaganda, finance, and the mechanics of underground action

Revolutionary organization required much more than weapons.

Newspapers, pamphlets, patriotic songs, historical biographies, gymnasiums, hostels, and festivals created a political culture in which sacrifice appeared honorable. Small reading circles identified recruits; initiation oaths protected secrecy; couriers moved messages; lawyers defended prisoners; families sheltered fugitives; and sympathetic employees leaked information. Political robberies, often called “swadeshi dacoities,” sought funds but risked alienating the public and blurring the line between revolutionary discipline and ordinary crime.

Colonial intelligence adapted. Postal censorship, informers, approvers, fingerprinting, press securities, surveillance of students, and coordination across imperial police forces made secrecy harder. Conspiracy trials converted association into evidence and allowed exemplary punishment. Transportation to the Andaman Islands removed activists from their regional networks. Repression was effective because cells were small, but spectacular trials also publicized revolutionary ideals.

Soldiers, peasants, and the missing organizational bridge

Most revolutionary plans assumed that soldiers were decisive because an alien government depended on Indian armed manpower. Contacts were made in cantonments, and Ghadar placed mutiny at the centre of its plan. Yet soldiers faced close surveillance, uneven political commitment, family risk, and regimental separation. A date fixed by civilian organizers could not guarantee coordinated military action.

Peasant support was similarly uneven. Punjab migrants returned with radical ideas, but village society included loyalist soldiers, landed beneficiaries, indebted cultivators, officials, and religious authorities. Bengal activists sometimes gained shelter

in rural areas without building institutions through which peasants defined programme and leadership. The gap between a courageous cadre and an organized social majority remained the strategic weakness.

Wartime loyalty was conditional politics

Moderate leaders, princes, business groups, and many peasants supported recruitment or war loans for different reasons: imperial loyalty, patronage, pressure, profit, or expectation of reform. Support should not be interpreted as consent to permanent subordination. Rising prices and coercive recruitment altered attitudes as war continued. The British expectation that sacrifice would be followed by limited reform collided with Indian expectation that sacrifice had earned substantive power. This widening expectation gap explains why the Montagu promise briefly reassured opinion but the restricted 1919 settlement failed to contain agitation.

Interpretations and debates

Nationalist interpretation treats revolutionaries as restoring courage after Swadeshi repression and exposing the violence beneath imperial law. Their sacrifice widened the imaginable limits of politics.

Bipan Chandra argues that individual heroic action could not replace mass mobilization and sometimes allowed repression to isolate activists. This criticism concerns strategy, not patriotism.

Maia Ramnath and transnational scholarship emphasize that Ghadar belonged to a global anti-colonial and migrant world, not merely Punjab history. Its secular republicanism exceeded the immediate failed plot.

Home Rule can be read as moderate dominion politics, yet its branch structure and vernacular propaganda rebuilt the organizational bridge between Swadeshi and Gandhi. The Lucknow

Pact likewise combined a genuine unity achievement with a representation formula that later hardened communal bargaining.

Balanced judgement: revolutionary and constitutional routes were not sealed compartments. Personnel, rhetoric, repression, and wartime opportunity crossed between them, while neither achieved mass nationwide organization before Gandhi.

Chapter companion

Use this section after reading the chapter. Reconstruct the sequence or comparison before checking the page.

Chronology

Date	Event	Why it matters
1904	Abhinav Bharat orga- nized	Creates a Maharashtra- centered revolution- ary network.
1907	Ghadar antecedents and expatriate ac- tivism expand	Punjab migration con- nects India to Pacific politics.
Apr 1908	Muzaffarpur bomb attack	Begins major Bengal conspiracy prosecu- tions.
1908–09	Alipore Bomb Case	Disrupts Manik- tala/Jugantar net- work; Aurobindo ac- quitted.
1909	Madan Lal Dhingra kills Curzon Wylie in London	Demonstrates expa- triate revolutionary reach.
1912	Bomb attack on Viceroy Hardinge in Delhi	Rashbehari Bose- linked network strikes imperial ceremony.

Date	Event	Why it matters
1913	Ghadar Party and newspaper established in North America	Creates explicitly international revolutionary organization.
1914	First World War begins; Komagata Maru returns	War opens opportunity while racial exclusion radicalizes migrants.
Feb 1915	Planned Ghadar military uprising fails	Informers and premature changes prevent coordinated mutiny.
1915	Defence of India Act	Gives broad detention and special-trial powers.
Apr 1916	Tilak's Home Rule League begins	Restarts constitutional agitation through branches and vernacular work.
Sep 1916	Annie Besant's All India Home Rule League begins	Extends propaganda and organization across much of India.
Dec 1916	Congress session and Lucknow Pact	Congress reunites; Congress and League agree on reform demands.
June 1917	Besant interned	Government action turns Home Rule into a broader protest.
20 Aug 1917	Montagu Declaration	First official commitment to progressive responsible government.
1918	Montagu-Chelmsford Report	Designs dyarchy and limited constitutional expansion.
1919	Government of India Act and Rowlatt legislation	Reform and coercion arrive together, exposing imperial contradiction.

High-confusion comparisons

Current	Goal	Method	Social-geographic strength	Main limit
Secret revolutionary groups	Overthrow and political awakening	Assassination, arms, cells, military contacts	Educated youth and regional networks	Isolation, surveillance, weak mass organization
Ghadar	Secular republican independence	Migrant propaganda and wartime insurrection	Overseas workers and Punjab returnees	Infiltration, arms shortage, premature planning
Home Rule leagues	Self-government within empire	Open branches, lectures, pamphlets, petitions	Urban and small-town educated public	Limited rural-worker mobilization and divided organization
Congress-League pact	Joint constitutional advance	Negotiated representation and reform demand	All-India elite organizations	Separate-electorate logic strengthened

Self-test

1. Why did revolutionary nationalism grow after 1907?
2. Distinguish Anushilan Samiti, Jugantar, and Abhinav Bharat.
3. What did the Muzaffarpur attack reveal about revolutionary strategy and risk?
4. Why was India House important?
5. What social experience produced Ghadar's ideology?
6. Why did the February 1915 uprising fail?
7. What was the significance of Komagata Maru?
8. Compare Tilak's and Besant's Home Rule leagues.
9. What did the Lucknow Pact achieve?
10. What was problematic about its representation formula?
11. Why was the Montagu Declaration both historic and limited?
12. How did revolutionary and constitutional politics interact?

Answer key

1. Swadeshi decline, Surat division, repression, leader arrests, and disappointment with existing methods encouraged secret armed action.
2. Anushilan and Jugantar were overlapping Bengal physical-culture and revolutionary networks; Abhinav Bharat was centered in Maharashtra and linked to Savarkar.
3. It dramatized courage and official vulnerability but killed unintended victims, invited repression, and showed the danger of isolated action.
4. It trained and connected expatriate students, published propaganda, circulated arms and ideas, and linked Indian struggle to European politics.
5. Migrant workers faced racial exclusion abroad and concluded that equal treatment required overthrowing colonial rule at home.
6. Intelligence infiltration, exposed dates, poor coordination, inadequate arms, arrests, and limited cantonment commitment defeated it.
7. It exposed racial migration controls across the empire and

- radicalized returning passengers and Punjabi opinion.
8. Tilak organized a concentrated western-central territory; Besant used a broader all-India Theosophical and press network.
 9. It reunited Congress factions and created a joint Congress-League scheme for greater elected and Indian authority.
 10. It accepted separate electorates and fixed communal weightage, strengthening community-based constitutional bargaining.
 11. It officially named responsible government as a goal but gave no deadline and left pace and judgment with British rulers.
 12. Repression, cadres, rhetoric, and wartime openings crossed boundaries; Home Rule offered open organization while revolutionary networks internationalized independence.

Closing perspective

Revolutionary nationalism emerged from repression and strategic frustration, not from absence of political ideas. Secret action restored courage but could not itself organize sustained mass power.

Source note

The Modern India volumes were developed from an integrated revision project drawing on Bipan Chandra's *History of Modern India*, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's *From Plassey to Partition and After*, and the Spectrum survey *A Brief History of Modern India*. Post-2019 coverage uses an official-source register with an evidence cutoff of 10 August 2026. The present books reorganize and independently edit that research into a continuous narrative and separate source claims from editorial synthesis.

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About the author

Gaurav Tiwari is an educator, WordPress developer, and the founder of Gatilab. His teaching work focuses on making difficult material easier to understand without flattening its debates, uncertainties, or consequences.

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