

## 4 Imperialism and the growth of nationalism

- ▶ *What were the different attitudes to independence?*
- ▶ *How did British and Indian attitudes towards each other develop in the late nineteenth century?*

At the start of the twentieth century the British Empire was the largest in world history and the Raj in India was often referred to as the 'Jewel in the Crown'. However, by 1914 there were signs of a nationalist movement to prepare Indians for the idea of self-government.

### Imperialism

The British Empire was just one of a number of European empires then at their height. The French, Belgians, Germans and Italians together with the British had all scrambled for parts of Africa and, nearer to home, the Austro-Hungarian and **Ottoman Empires** remained solid. All had difficulties with local peoples and politics but there was no sense that imperialism as a global system would disappear.

### The importance of India to Britain

Official British policy was commitment to eventual Indian self-government within the Empire but it was seen as a lengthy project of many decades. The sheer size and symbolism of India as a 'possession' of the British made it indispensable to British power and prestige around the globe. In addition, the Indian Army was a huge military force at its disposal in Asia. A new strategic importance of India was its role in resisting southward expansion of the Russian Empire and, to a lesser extent, the Chinese. Spying and skirmishes in the Himalayas became known as 'The Great Game'.

Empires were costly to protect and maintain but they provided access to vast resources for the manufacturing industries in Britain, whose goods were then sold back to colonial markets, with the imperial government extracting taxes at all stages of the process.

Socially, the British shouldered willingly the so-called **white man's burden** of passing on European culture and civilisation. Such a responsibility was, of course, self-defined and self-justifying. One British leader described it, rather tastelessly, as 'splendid happy slavery'. In practice, however, the educated but underemployed Bengali elite had time on its hands to imagine a different way of governing India.

### KEY TERMS

**Ottoman Empire** Islamic Empire of the Middle East and modern Turkey.

**White man's burden** The perceived duty of white-ruled nations to govern so-called inferior races and countries.

Perhaps the most that could be hoped for, sooner or later, was that India would gain **Dominion status** within the Empire. Dominion status had been granted to Canada in 1867, Australia in 1901 and South Africa in 1910 (all of them white-ruled, of course). For India, the key question was whether India was yet a nation. Many certainly spoke of it as a nation in the making but many had doubts about ever unifying India under Indian rule.

### Nationalism

The late nineteenth century also saw the growing success of nationalist movements, based on recognition of peoples with their own shared history, language and culture and a right to self-determination. In some cases, the history was rather romanticised, if not completely false, and the future envisaged as dream rather than practicality. There were two complementary nationalist objectives: unification and **secession**. For example:

- In 1871 modern Germany was formed from the unification of hundreds of small independent states.
- In the same year, the regions of Italy fought free from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and unified as a nation-state.
- In Ireland, Britain's oldest colonial conquest, there was a growing and violent nationalist movement but a bill to provide home rule in Ireland was defeated in 1886.
- The British had defeated the Boers in South Africa in 1902 but soon granted political equality.
- Nationalist wars in the Balkans in the early years of the twentieth century would provide the trigger for the First World War.

Moreover, the outcome of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5 was a sign of a changing world order: a small Asian country had defeated a great European power.

### The growth of nationalism in India

It has been argued that the 1858 Royal Proclamation laid the foundation for the nationalist movement in India. By 1900 there was a growing sense of a nation in the making because of:

- a growth in public **secular** education and in intellectual and cultural debate
- modernising of religious attitudes among both Hindus and Muslims
- a gradual increase in education in the English language
- opening of jobs in the ICS to Indian applicants
- expansion of the railway network, permitting the circulation across the whole of India of English-language newspapers.

As a result, the growing Indian middle class became the fertile soil of the nationalist movement (see Source C on page 14).

### KEY TERMS

**Dominion status** A category of self-government within the British Empire denoting a full nation.

**Secession** The formal breakaway of one part of a country.

**Secular** Public, non-religious affairs.

? What does Source C tell us about nationalist feeling in India at the beginning of the twentieth century?

**SOURCE C**

From an anonymous letter by an educated Muslim, quoted in *Valentine Chirol, Indian Unrest, Macmillan, 1910, p. 123.*

*English observers must not forget that there is throughout India amongst Hindus a strong tendency towards imitating the national movements that have proved successful in European history. Now, while vis-à-vis [with regard to] the British, the Hindu irreconcilables assume the attitude of the Italian patriots towards the hated Austrian, vis-à-vis the Moslems there is a very different European model for them to follow. Not only Tilak [Bal Gangadhar Tilak, see below] and his school in Poona but throughout the Punjab and Bengal the constant talk of Nationalists is that the Moslems must be driven out of India as they were driven out of Spain [after 1492].*

**Aligarh and the Muslim League**

The Muslim community, anxious to throw off blame for the mutiny, took a leading role in education and modernisation. In 1875 the Muslim Anglo-Oriental College was founded at Aligarh. The college gave its name to a broad movement across India with the aim of increasing Muslim prominence in social affairs. The movement also initiated the idea of two self-respecting communities within India (Hindu and Muslim). In 1913 the college became a full university.

The fury of Hindus over the creation of a Muslim-majority province in the partition of Bengal had convinced Muslims that, as and when Indians were permitted to take part in government, Muslims would be overwhelmed by the general Hindu majority.

As a result, in December 1906 the All-India Muslim League was founded at Dacca, Bengal. Although for many years it was little more than a debating society for its educated, middle-class members, the Muslim League would eventually become, under its final leader, **Muhammad Ali Jinnah**, the driving force for partition and the creation of Muslim Pakistan (see his profile on page 69).

**Congress**

The origin of the Indian National **Congress** lies in a meeting of educated middle-class Indians at the Imperial **Durbar** of 1877. In 1885 it was constituted as a political group and in due course became the driver of nationalist independence campaigns. Both Hindus and Muslims came to Congress and were prominent in its affairs. One early decision had been to ensure that its discussions did not alienate religious groups and weaken its claim to speak for all India.

Of course, there were no general elections in which it might put up candidates. Congress adopted a strategy of lobbying MPs in Britain, so most of the early Congress activity was directed at raising money to fund a small organisation and newspaper in London. Most of the early demands of Congress related to increasing education and access to positions in the administration of India.

**KEY FIGURE**

**Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1875-1948)**

Leader of the Muslim League and first governor-general of Pakistan.

**KEY TERMS**

**Congress** Originally a word for a large meeting, later the name of the political party itself.

**Durbar** Imperial celebration.

In the early years of the twentieth century there was a split within Congress between moderates and radicals. The moderates, led by **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, hoped for political reform and believed in peaceful, lawful methods. The radicals, led by **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, argued that the lack of consultation over the Bengal partition showed that the British would never be fair to Indians. They wanted more urgent, direct, even violent action.

A later leader of Congress, **Mohandas Gandhi**, would become the national figurehead of the independence movement (see his profile on page 40).

**Changing British and Indian attitudes**

During the late nineteenth century, the British elite became more aloof and racist. In the time of the East India Company, British merchants learned the local languages and even married local women. Now the deliberate growth of English language education meant there were many Indian translators. Raj society replicated upper-class society in the home country. The mutiny had left a long memory and complex attitudes among many of the British. They were distrustful and aware of how vulnerable they were as such a small minority protected by mainly Indian soldiers. Yet they could not help being contemptuous of Indian 'backwardness'.

**SOURCE D**

From memoranda by **Viceroy Lord Ripon** written in 1881-2, quoted in **Judith Brown, Modern India: The Origins of Asian Democracy, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 106 and 133.**

*We cannot now rely on military force alone and policy as well as justice ought to prompt us to endeavour to govern more and more by means of and in accordance with that growing public opinion which is beginning to show itself throughout the country.*

*We shall not subvert the British Empire by allowing the Bengali baboo [babu] to discuss his own schools and drains. Rather shall we afford him a safety-valve if we can turn his attention to such innocuous subjects.*

**SOURCE E**

From a letter to the newspaper **Kesari** in 1900, quoted in **S.R. Mehrotra, Towards India's Freedom and Partition, Vikas Publishing, 1978, p. 35.**

*We are thoroughly convinced that India cannot recover her national freedom in the real sense of the word independently of English protection, assistance and control. We are aware of the loss which we are at present suffering from British government yet we do not believe that our condition will be any better by the exchange of the British rule for that of any other nation ... Since we are not in a position to gain our independence by fighting with the English or to preserve it when gained it is desirable that we should advance step by step behaving in a conciliatory manner with the British.*

**KEY FIGURES**

**Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915)**

Leader of the moderate wing of Congress, opposed to violent protest.

**Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920)**

Leader of the radical wing of Congress, approved of violent protest, founder of the Home Rule League (1916).

**Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)**

Later leader of the independence movement.

Compare and contrast Sources D and E for evidence of the attitudes of the British and Indians towards each other.

**KEY TERM**

**Babu** Bengali term for clerk.

Don't tell you the opinions of ICS or British public opinion.

Not equality corp. only?

Previous 1885 ICS, Notionism

Comments of a young boy.

Reliability & Contribution

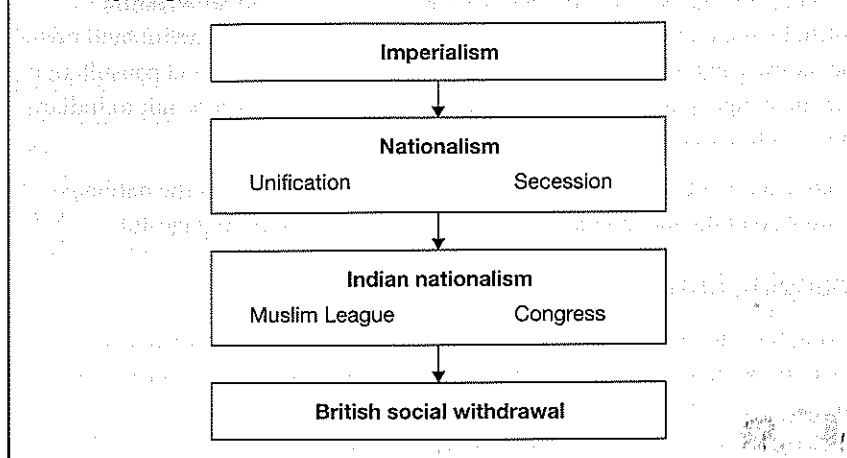
Delegation? Fear of rule is crucial.

Viceroy is the main motivation for men, his British work - money and respect

British officials were not forced; they need control to do whatever it took to guarantee comfortable & productive people.



Summary diagram: Imperialism and the growth of nationalism



### Chapter summary

This chapter has set out the historical development of the key social, cultural and political elements of India leading up to 1914. India was enormous and very diverse in all sorts of ways and had never been completely unified by any ruler or elite. At most, in the Mughal period and in the British Raj, hegemony had been extended over large parts of the subcontinent through treaties and paramountcy. The British were forced by the Indian Mutiny to

recognise that if they wanted to retain power they had to exercise active control and engage with Indian political aspirations. At the same time, they attempted to deflect attention from the reality. Controlling an empire was expensive and like other imperialists they exploited the native population to pay for it. This was disguised by a moral obligation to educate and civilise the population and prepare them for self-government in the European style one day far in the future. As we shall see, their lack of commitment was disguised by exploitation of the disagreements between religious communities.

### Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- 1 What were the major communities in the Indian socio-political landscape?
- 2 What were the causes and consequences of the Indian Mutiny?
- 3 How did the princely states relate to the British Raj?
- 4 What were the reasons for the partition of Bengal?
- 5 How did the Indian Councils Act set a constitutional precedent for communities?
- 6 In what ways was India of strategic importance to the British Empire?
- 7 What were the origins of the Muslim League?
- 8 What were the origins of Congress?
- 9 How did British attitudes respond to a changing Indian society in the late nineteenth century?
- 10 What were the key elements of the system of British governance of India in the period up to 1914?

## The First World War and its impact on British India 1914–20

During the First World War India generally supported the British Empire but gained new perspectives on its values. There was moderate, and collaborative, nationalist agitation. Two future leaders began to make their name: Gandhi and Jinnah. Their relationship affects the rest of this history. Britain responded with a promise of constitutional progress but imposed harsh control measures, culminating in an atrocity which still tarnishes the British period. In the end, a major piece of constitutional legislation was regarded as too little, too late.

This chapter examines:

- ★ India and the First World War
- ★ War and the growth of nationalism
- ★ The effects of the war on British rule

### Key dates

<b>1914</b>	Outbreak of the Great War (later called the First World War)	<b>1917</b>	Imperial War Conference
<b>1915</b>	Indian Army's Mesopotamian campaign		Balfour Declaration
	<i>Ghadr</i> agitation	<b>1918</b>	Russian Revolution
<b>1916</b>	Defence of India Act		Armistice (end of war)
<b>Dec.</b>	Formation of home rule leagues	<b>1919</b>	Rowlatt Act (Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act)
	Lucknow Pact between Congress and Muslim League	<b>April 13</b>	Amritsar Massacre
<b>1917 Aug.</b>	Montagu Declaration	<b>Dec.</b>	Government of India Act 1919 (Montford Reforms)