

CHAPTER

3

Life in Imperial India

It had been a long journey from England in the little sailing ship—down the coast of Africa, around the Cape, and across the Indian Ocean. As he watched the line of land on the horizon come nearer, the young English sailor tried to imagine what this strange land of India would be like. He had heard so many stories—of palaces whose walls were covered with pearls and gold, huge beasts with leathery skins and long trunks that could lift a log, white humpbacked bulls that people fed and decorated with flowers. Would any of the stories actually be true? The sailor did know that many men in the service of “John Company”—the nickname for the East India Company—had made fortunes here. Maybe he would, too—and go home to his village wearing a gold ring and a coat made of rich silk cloth, a richer man than the village had ever seen before. . . .

In the 1700’s and 1800’s, such dreams drew many young Englishmen to look for fortune and adventure in England’s new colony of India. They found a bewildering variety of people, customs, terrain, and climate. While Britain’s empire extended literally around the world, this vast land—as big as a continent—became its most prized possession. During some 300 years of colonial influence, the British left a lasting mark on India—and India in turn changed all the Britons who came there to work and live. This chapter looks at how British rule was established and how the Indians later moved to claim their independence.

SECTION 1/The Rise of British India

Focus Questions

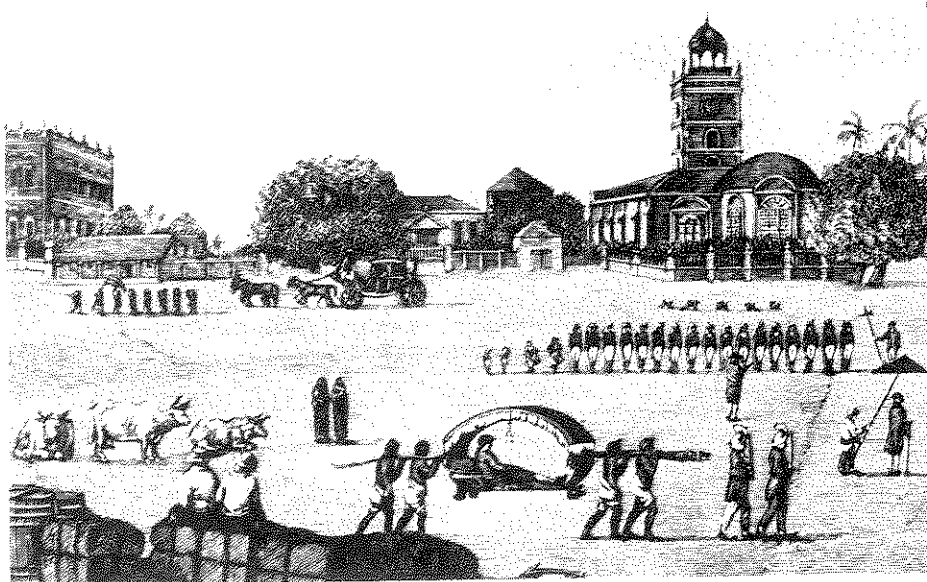
- How did Britain extend its empire into India?
(pages 49–55)
- How did the British govern India?
(pages 55–56)

Terms to Know

Battle of Plassey	zamindar
Regulating Act	Sepoy Rebellion
the Raj	viceroy
India Act	

The British officials and businesspeople who lived in India were never more than a tiny minority of the population of that huge country. Their great advantage lay not in numbers but in unity. The Indian people had no concept of nationalism until long after the arrival of the British. The people of India had rich and sophisticated cultures, but their loyalties lay with their religions and their villages, not with the idea of India as a whole.

Even the Mogul Empire (page 319) had not succeeded in welding India together as a nation. In the 1700’s, the power of the Moguls had begun to fade. Local princes rebelled against Mogul rule.



The East India Company originally had powers usually reserved for a national government, such as maintaining an army. This eighteenth-century engraving shows soldiers of the East India Company army at drill in Bombay.

Their little armies and marauding bands of robbers started to fight one another for power.

The Foundations of Empire

The English East India Company, a joint-stock trading company (page 569), had a better chance of success in this struggle than any of the local armed groups. The Company's officials had large amounts of money at their command and the Company even had its own army and naval force. The men who led "John Company" were inspired not only by the desire for great profit; they also had a strong belief that the destiny of the West was to bring its civilization to the lands of the East. In this effort, however, the East India Company also had to deal with rivalry from the French. Like the English, the French made alliances with local Indian rulers and set up trading posts.

Early British actions. The East India Company was a trading company, but the men who joined it knew they might have to fight to win and protect the right to trade in India. They faced death not only at the hands of hostile Indian armies, but also from cholera, malaria, and other diseases. Many of the men who came to India in the eighteenth century were considered failures by their families. They had already ruined their prospects at home and so came to India to make a new life for themselves.

Robert Clive (page 570) was such an adventurer. As a boy in England he had organized an extortion racket to get money from local shopkeepers. He arrived in India at the age of 18 and found a job as a clerk for the East India Company.

When Clive grew tired of measuring bales of cotton, he volunteered to lead an expedition against the French and their Indian allies. Clive's forces won several victories against the French in southern India, and he was called to fight on the northern coast in 1756, after a young Indian ruler attacked Calcutta. (Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay were the Company's three great strongholds in India; see map, page 52.)

An incident that occurred during this conflict increased anti-Indian feelings among the British. A number of British soldiers captured at Calcutta died a terrible death when they were forced into a room about 14 by 18 feet and left without adequate air and water. A survivor claimed that 146 men had been trapped in the room and only 23 had survived. Later studies of this episode revealed that fewer than 70 men had actually been imprisoned. Nevertheless, the place where they died became known to the British as the "Black Hole of Calcutta."

Clive recaptured Calcutta in January 1757. That same year he won the **Battle of Plassey** against Indian forces. This victory established British sovereignty in Bengal, and put a pro-British ruler on the throne of Bengal. It also made Bengal a prosperous base for East India Company expansion.

In the years that followed, Clive and other officials of the Company made huge profits from the collection of taxes in Bengal and from bribes given them by local officials. Much of this booty they kept for themselves. So many former officials of the East India Company became wealthy that they formed a club in London called the Nabobs, from an Indian word meaning "a rich and important official."

By 1772 the officials of the East India Company had brought the Company to the verge of bankruptcy. Parliament agreed to help the Company with a loan of one and a half million pounds.

Increased parliamentary control. At the same time Parliament passed the **Regulating Act**, which brought British India under the indirect control of the British government. This act reorganized the administration of **the Raj** (RAHJ), as the British rule of India was called. It set up a governing council in Calcutta headed by a governor-general. It also established a supreme court at Calcutta, giving India a judicial system modeled on Britain's. All these reforms were supervised by Warren Hastings, an East India Company employee who served as governor-general from 1774 to 1785.

During his years as governor-general, Hastings expanded the East India Company's holdings in India. He justified this action by what became the standard argument for expansion throughout the whole history of the Raj: the British had to continue to defeat enemies at their borders, and British India had to grow larger if it was not to become smaller. In the words of Hastings, there was "a war actual or impending in every quarter and with every power in Hindustan." (*Hindustan* is another name for the subcontinent of India.)

It was true that the British were menaced by roving bands of soldiers from the highlands of the Himalayas—warriors who attacked the villages that lay outside the Company's strongholds. The British were also threatened by a number of Indian princes who were rulers of small states. Yet many of the princes had been goaded into revolt by repeated demands for money on the part of the British.

Clearly the British thirst for profits played a part in the war that Hastings saw as "actual or impending" throughout India. By Hastings' time, trade



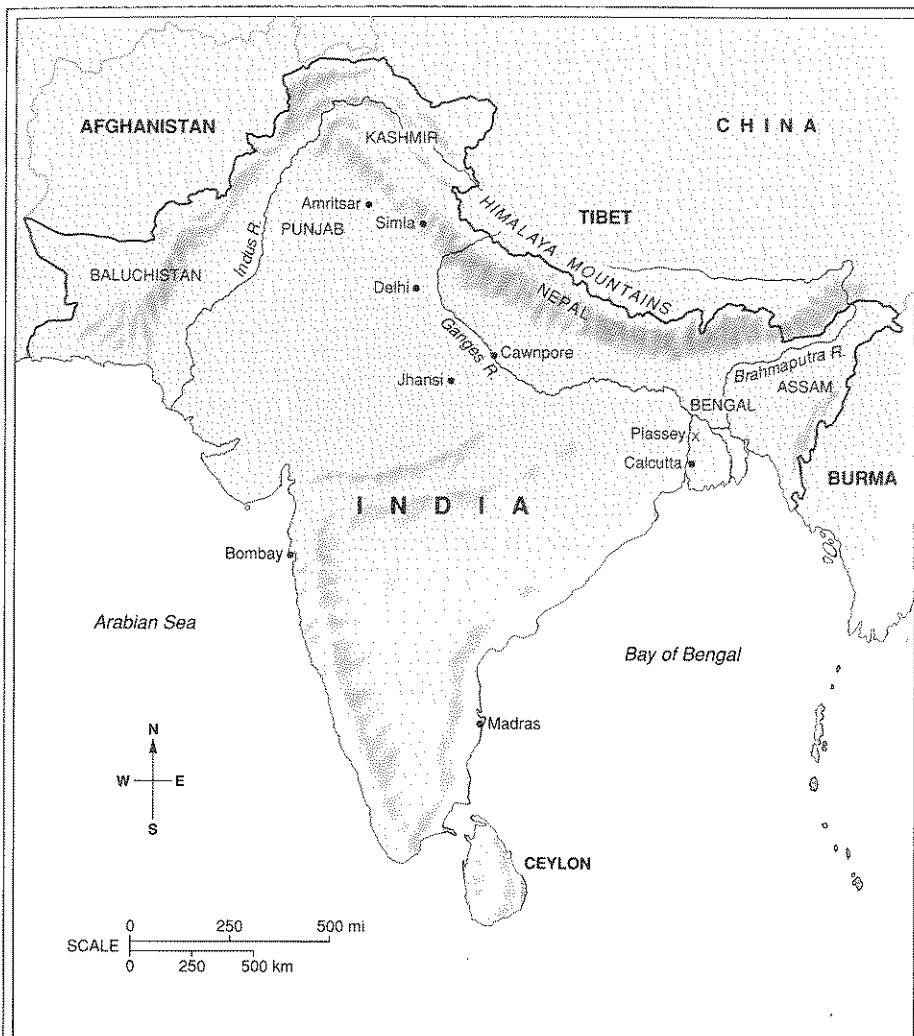
Robert Clive worked as a clerk for the East India Company, before joining the Company army. His military campaigns against the French and their Indian allies in the 1750's secured the region of Bengal for the British.

with India had become very important to the British economy. British merchants bought opium in India and sold it to the Chinese in return for tea, silk, and porcelain. They also bought Indian cloth, saltpeter, and indigo, although the demand for cloth would be undermined within a few decades by the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain.

The Reforms of the Raj

Hastings had almost no help from the British government in his expansion of British power and interests in India. By the 1780's the government in London decided to tighten its control over British India. As part of this effort, Parliament passed the **India Act** in 1784. Parliament now had the right to choose the top officials of the East India Company, including the governor-general.

Administrative changes. Lord Cornwallis, the general who surrendered at Yorktown in the American Revolution, was made governor-general of India soon after the passage of the India Act.



India Under British Rule

This map shows India as a British colony in the mid-1800's. How are the cities of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta geographically similar? Why did this make them especially important to the East India Company?

Cornwallis changed the face of government in British India. Under the old system, East India Company employees had acted as merchants, soldiers, and government administrators all at once. With Cornwallis's reforms, government workers were carefully chosen and professionally trained. Moreover, he divided the Company's service into separate commercial and political branches, so that Company officials could no longer use their influence to make money for themselves.

zamindars found they could not collect the taxes, many sold the land to buyers from the cities who were looking for easy profits. Zamindars had never been known for their kindness to the villagers, but the new absentee landlords had even less concern for their tenants.

As the administration of British India became more elaborate, the empire continued to grow. In the early 1800's, the East India Company gained the territory between Madras and Bengal (see map).

Like many of the British in India, Cornwallis was strongly prejudiced against Indians, a bias clearly shown in a view he once declared: "Every native of India, I verily believe, is corrupt." He began a policy of Europeanization in the Company, firing all Indians who held high posts in the civil service.

Indians naturally resented the changes in the civil service. They also hated Cornwallis's reform of the tax system. Ever since the days of Robert Clive, the British had used Mogul tax collectors called **zamindars** to collect taxes in Bengal and neighboring regions. These taxes normally varied from year to year, but in 1793 the British set fixed taxes that the zamindars were responsible for collecting. They also made the zamindars the owners of the land in their districts, ignoring the traditional rights of the village farmers.

Hardships resulted for the people of the villages. The tax rates were set too high. When the

The British also annexed the regions of Assam and Lower Burma, and they forced many smaller Indian states to accept British interference in their affairs. Most importantly, the British, in a series of wars fought between 1845 and 1849, defeated the Sikhs. The Sikhs were a powerful people of northwest India whose religion borrowed from both Islam and Hinduism. With their victory over the Sikhs, the British won the rich province of the Punjab and destroyed the last serious threat to their supremacy in India.

Changes in social policy. During this period of renewed expansion, the British began to feel that they had a moral duty to westernize the Indians as well as to trade with them. In 1813 Parliament had abolished the East India Company's trading monopoly in India, and trade was no longer the sole reason for the British presence there. At the same time, Parliament opened the country to Christian missionaries, though it stopped short of offering them government sponsorship. Ten thousand pounds were also set aside annually for the promotion of education in India. Most British officials agreed that this money should be used to educate Indians in Western culture.

William Bentinck, who was made governor-general in 1828, was an eager advocate of westernization. He believed that India's future could be improved by the adoption of Western standards. In addition, Bentinck hoped to put an end to Hindu customs that were unacceptable to Europeans. As governor-general, Bentinck passed laws that launched a number of far-reaching reforms. These laws:

- outlawed suttee—the practice of burning alive Hindu widows on their husbands' funeral pyres.
- suppressed thuggee—ritual murder and robbery in the name of the goddess Kali.
- established schools and colleges with a Western curriculum taught in English.
- made English the official language of India.
- implemented a policy of "Indianization" by increasing the number of Indians in government administration.
- began the revision of Indian law by introducing English legal philosophy and procedures.

The Mutiny and After

Several of Bentinck's successors as governor-general shared similar ideas about the need for westernization and modernization in India. By the early 1850's, British administrators in India were building vast public works projects, such as roads, canals, and railroads. They were also energetically backing Western education.

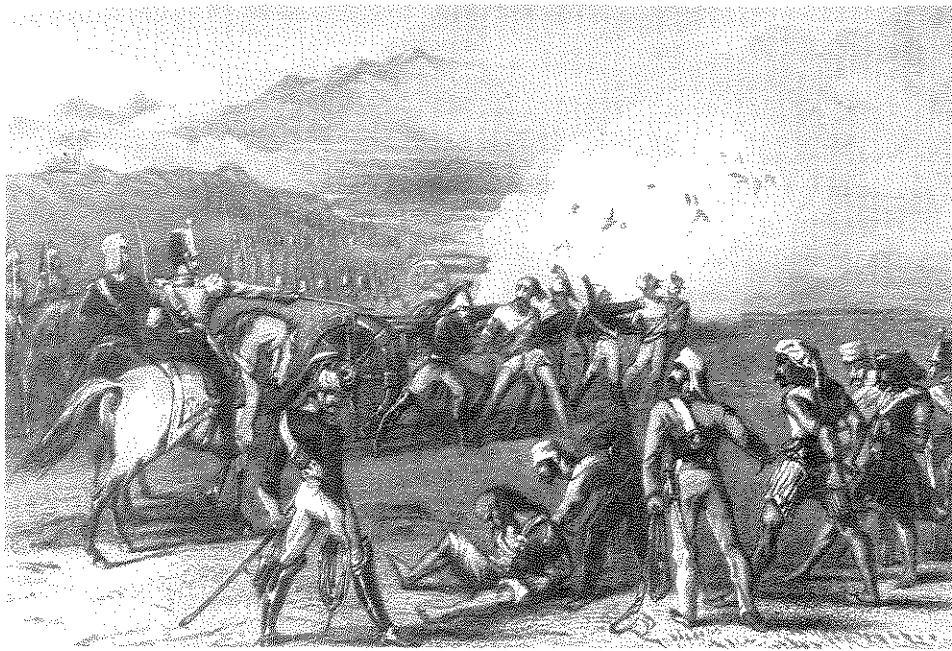
The British generally thought that the British Raj was a resounding success, and few realized that resentment and mistrust of westernization were growing among the people of India. When Charles Canning accepted his post as governor-general in 1855, he made a speech that was truer than he knew at the time. He said, "We must not forget that in the sky of India, serene as it is, a cloud may arise, at first no bigger than a man's hand but which, growing bigger and bigger, may at last threaten to overwhelm us with ruin."

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—Governor-General Charles Canning, 1855

The cloud on the horizon was the Indian reaction to westernization. By trying to change ways of living too quickly, the British had angered many Indians. By 1857 many Hindus and Muslims felt that their religious beliefs and customs were threatened. Early in that year the rumor had spread that the British were having sepoy (Indian troops) handle gun cartridges smeared with pigs' and cows' fat. This angered the Hindus, to whom the cow was sacred, and disgusted the Muslims, whose religion forbade them to touch pork. Many sepoys believed that the British officers were deliberately trying to undermine their religion.

The signs of a coming rebellion were small but ominous. Village police began to whisper the slogan "Everything will become red." Just before rebellion broke out, an English captain named E. M.



Both the British and the Indians were known to treat their enemies barbarically. Here, the British kill captured sepoys by shooting them out of a cannon.

Martineau wrote the following account of the discontent he saw among the Indian soldiers:

☞ Feeling is as bad as can be and matters have gone so far that I can hardly devise any suitable remedy. We make a grand mistake in supposing that because we dress, arm, and drill Hindustani soldiers as Europeans, they become one bit European in their feelings and ideas. I see them on parade for say two hours daily, but what do I know of them for the other 22? What do they talk about . . . ? What do they plot . . . ?

I know that at the present moment an unusual agitation is pervading the ranks of the entire native army, but what it will exactly result in, I am afraid to say. I can detect the near approach of the storm, I can hear the moaning of the hurricane, but I can't say how, when, or where it will break forth. . . . I don't think they know themselves what they will do, or that they have any plan of action except of resistance to invasion of their religion and their faith.

But . . . here are all the elements of combustion at hand—100,000 men, sullen, distrustful, fierce, . . . and we thinking to cajole them into good humor by patting them on the back, saying what a fool you are for making such a fuss about nothing. They no longer believe us,

they have passed out of restraint and will be off at a gallop before long. If a flare-up from any cause takes place at one station, it will spread and become universal. ☞

(1) What criticism did Captain Martineau make of the British reaction to Indian unrest? (2) Do you think higher British officials would have shared his view of the situation? Why or why not?

The first outbreak of the uprising that came to be called the **Sepoy Rebellion** came near Delhi in May 1857. Three units of Indian soldiers persuaded the aged Mogul emperor to give them support. Other mutinies flared up in other parts of British India, and many besieged British communities had to fight off sepoy attacks while waiting for help to arrive.

The most notorious incident of the uprising was the slaughter at the town of Cawnpore, where sepoy rebels killed a number of British women and children by dashing their brains out against a tree, and threw the corpses down a well. To many Europeans this was proof of the barbarity of the Indian character. It is worth noting, on the other hand, that the British behaved no better in seeking retri-

bution for these terrible actions. British forces tortured many of the rebellious sepoys before hanging them, and when the British captured the city of Jhansi, they killed civilians indiscriminately along with soldiers. An Indian priest gave the following account of what happened at Jhansi:

☞ I offered my evening prayers, ate a meal, and went upstairs to see the condition of the city. And what a sight I saw: it looked like a vast burning ground. Fires were blazing everywhere, and although it was night I could see far enough. In the lanes and streets people were crying pitifully, hugging the corpses of their dear ones; others were wandering, searching for food while the cattle were running mad with thirst. . . .

How cruel and ruthless were these white soldiers, I thought; they were killing people for crimes they had not committed. . . . Not only did the English soldiers kill those who happened to come in their way, but they broke into houses and hunted out people hidden in barns, rafters, and obscure dark corners. They explored the inmost recesses of temples and filled them with dead bodies of priests and worshipers. They took the greatest toll in the weavers' locality, where they killed some women also.

At the sight of white soldiers some people tried to hide in haystacks but the pitiless demons did not leave them alone there. They set the haystacks on fire, and hundreds were burnt alive. ☞

(1) What do phrases such as "pitiless demons" tell you about the priest's perception of the British soldiers? (2) If he had been in Cawnpore at the time of the Indian attack, what might have been his reaction?

The Sepoy Rebellion ended after a few months of hard fighting. The Indian troops, without unified leadership, could not maintain their assault on the powerful forces of the East India Company. One result of the uprising, however, was the British government's decision to take over direct responsibility for India.

Colonial rule. In 1858 Parliament abolished the East India Company and formally annexed its

territories in India (page 571). From that time on, British India was run by an official called the Secretary of State for India, who was also a member of the British cabinet in London. The governor general was now called the **viceroy** (meaning royal governor), a title that indicated that he was the personal representative of the British monarch. Actually, the viceroy had much less power than had the governors-general. The important decisions about British India were now made in London.

British India proper, governed directly by the viceroy and the officials of the civil service, included about three-fourths of the whole population. The rest of the people lived under local rulers who had various titles. At each of these rulers' courts, however, there was a British *resident* or *agent* who was there to "advise" the ruler. Since the adviser had the full force of the British Empire behind him, his suggestions usually were heeded.

Shown here is the Maharajah of Bhamagar. Maharajahs—local Indian princes—were originally overlords who had been given land by the Indian ruler. As their wealth grew, they began to use the royal name *rajah*, and some took the title *maharajah* ("great ruler").



This arrangement helped British control, for it kept India divided and delayed the growth of national spirit.

The British did realize, however, that they would have to be more informed about Indian concerns if they were to continue to rule with success. Six Indian members, to be either princes or aristocrats, were added to the council that advised the viceroy. These Indians would have little power, but at least their voices would be heard. Also, the British gave financial rewards and territorial guarantees to princes and landowners who had refused to support the 1857 uprising.

The Sepoy Rebellion also led the British government to reform the army in India. There were three major aspects to this reform: (1) The British continued the separation of the three armies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras, since this had helped prevent the spread of the fighting. But they raised the ratio of European soldiers from one for every five Indian soldiers to one for every two. (2) The British made sure that the officers, who were always European, lived in much closer contact with their soldiers than before. (3) The British stopped recruiting Brahmins and other high-caste Indians, who were especially sensitive to slights against their religion. Instead they recruited Sikhs (page 53), who had remained loyal to the British during the rebellion, as well as the Gurkhas and Punjabis of northern India.

The most important change resulting from the Sepoy Rebellion lay in the government's plans for

the future of India. Many British people now thought that the Indian capacity for moral and social improvement had been overestimated. They became more cautious about westernization, and less willing to make radical reforms. Their paternalistic attitude toward

the Indians became stronger than ever. In 1858 John Lawrence, Governor of the Punjab and later Viceroy of India, declared, "We have not been elected or placed in power by the people, but we are here through our moral superiority, by the force of circumstances, by the will of Providence. This alone constitutes our charter to govern India.

In doing the best we can for the people, we are bound by our conscience, and not by theirs."

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—John Lawrence, Governor of the Punjab, 1858

Section 1 Review

1. **Define or identify:** Battle of Plassey, Regulating Act, the Raj, India Act, zamindar, Sepoy Rebellion, viceroy.
2. What role did the East India Company play in the rise of British India?
3. What was William Bentinck's main goal as governor-general?
4. How did Indians react to British efforts to westernize India?
5. **Critical thinking:** Could the British have prevented the Sepoy Rebellion? Give reasons to support your answer.

SECTION 2/Colonial Society in India

Focus Questions

- What kind of colonial society did the British create in India? (pages 57–59)
- How did the Indians and the British interact? (pages 59–62)

Terms to Know

caste
Indian Civil Service
boxwallah
ayah
purdah

The British people who lived in India during the years of the Raj made every effort to maintain Western customs and to live exactly as they had lived at home in England. This was not so difficult in large cities like Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi. It was harder in the small towns or military stations where the British community was made up of only fifty to a hundred people. Assignments were changed frequently, and many English families moved from place to place without putting down

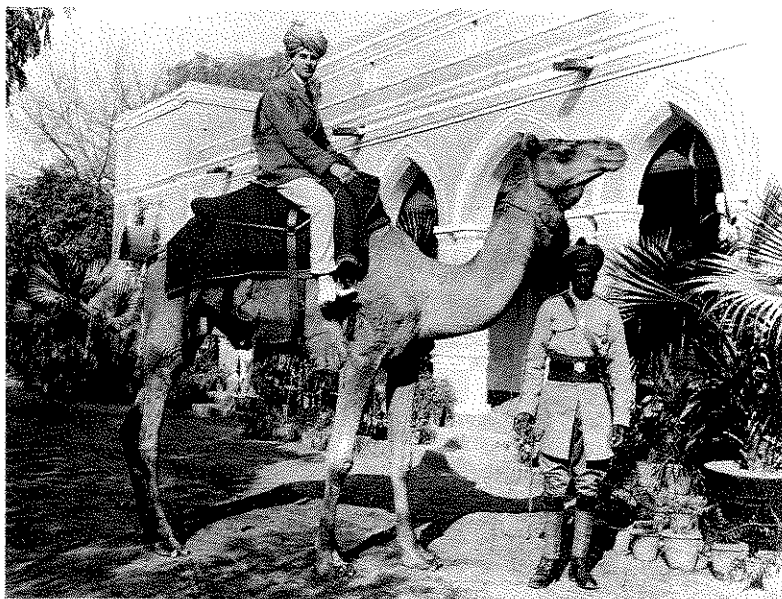
British and Indians generally knew each other through their work relationships. This photograph from 1912 shows a British official astride a camel with his Indian manservant standing by.

roots anywhere in India. They rarely if ever looked to their Indian neighbors for companionship; most spent years in the country without ever getting to the heart of Indian life.

British Colonial Life

Social status. British society in India was nearly as much dominated by class as Indian society was by caste. (Castes were fixed social groupings in Hindu society; they were based on class, occupation, and tradition.) About half the British men in India were employed by the government, and official rankings were the ones that counted socially. The elite in British colonial society were the members of the **Indian Civil Service** (called ICS for short). They were often jokingly called the “heaven-born,” which was an Indian term for the Brahmin caste; like the Brahmins, the ICS officers were at the top of the “social ladder.”

ICS positions included district officer, judge, governor, and member of the viceroy’s council. Upper-class British men who did not join the ICS were often officers of the Indian Army. British merchants, or **boxwallahs**, as they were called, did not belong to the “top drawer” of society. Many were



rich and respected, but buying and selling was not considered a gentleman's occupation. Ranking below the boxwallahs were the "domiciled Europeans," who had been born in India and who would probably remain there all of their lives. They were not asked to join the best clubs, and respectable British society laughed at their accent and their unawareness of British customs. Even more isolated were the Eurasians, the children of British and Indian parents.

Middle-class and upper-class British families in India usually had an enormous number of servants. Servants' wages were very low by British standards (though high by Indian standards). Most British families had at least 10 Indian servants, and some families had 30 or 40. British children were often raised by Indian nurses called *ayahs* or by English nannies. By custom, children were sent to school in England at an early age—even as young as five—because it was believed that the Indian climate was unhealthy for English children.

India's climate *was* hard for English people. Temperatures rose to well over 100° F day after day during the hot-weather season. The wives of officers and civil servants usually went to stay at hill stations in the foothills of the Himalayas to escape the heat. Rudyard Kipling's classic book of short stories, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, tells about life in one such hill station at the town of Simla.

The harsh Indian climate was one reason that the English did not colonize India as they did Australia and New Zealand. Most English people in India were administrators and army officers and their families; these people lived in India because they had to, not because they wanted to settle there. A Russian traveler, commenting on the importance of the climate in India's history, wrote in 1880, "Indians send up their prayers to the sun not for nothing; the sun has done them a great service." Although the climate did not protect India from invasions and foreign control, the heat was a natural deterrent for great numbers of British colonizers.

Englishwomen in India. Throughout the period of British rule in India, British men outnumbered British women by a ratio of three to one. India was thought of as an easy place to find a husband, and during the nineteenth century, English-



British children were often cared for by Indian ayahs. Most British adults avoided social contact with Indians. Do you think children raised by ayahs acted differently when they became adults? Why or why not?

women who did not marry had few opportunities in life. As a result, shiploads of young Englishwomen went out to India during the cool season in the hope of getting married.

Once they had settled in India, many British women found that colonial society was rigidly conventional and that they were expected to follow set customs and ways of life. A writer named Vere Birdwood wrote about the lives of these women in this way:

☞ [Englishwomen were] never entirely integrated with India and this was terribly important as far as the whole ethos [value system] of the Raj was concerned. The men were very closely integrated but not their wives.

We were in India, we were looked after by Indian servants, and we met a great many Indians, and some of us undoubtedly made a very close study of India and Indian customs, but once you stepped inside the home you were back in Cheltenham or Bath [English cities]. We brought with us in our home lives almost

exact replicas of the sort of life that upper middle-class people lived in England at that time.

It was very homogeneous in the sense that nearly everyone in official India sprang from precisely the same educational and cultural background. You went from bungalow to bungalow and you found the same sort of furniture, the same sort of dinner table set, the same kind of conversation. We read the same books, mostly imported by post from England, and I can't really say that we took an awful lot from India. 99

(1) Why did British women remain ignorant of the real India? (2) Do you think that British men were more "closely integrated" with Indian life? Why or why not?

Although the British in India did not learn much about the lives of the Indian people, many did come to feel at home there. They learned to admire the Indian countryside, and they liked the friendliness of the British communities, where people came to know one another well in an ongoing round of parties and visits. Most British eventually went back to England, but they did not forget India. One Englishwoman declared after returning to England, "India was my home and I have left half of myself behind."

Barriers Between English and Indian Society

Throughout the period of British rule, Indian society continued to be very separate from British society. Differences in customs were among the barriers that divided the two groups of people. Hindus and Muslims could only eat food prepared according to the rules of their own religions. Even Indians who were willing to ignore these restrictions often found British food unappetizing. Furthermore, every Hindu caste had elaborate rules about what kind of work its members could perform and whom they could marry and associate with.

It was ironic that the British looked down on Indians, since upper-caste Hindus were taught by their religion to avoid contact with other castes and with those of no caste (which included the Brit-

ish). British people had to remember never to shake hand with Brahmins, since the Brahmins would then have to undergo a long ritual for purification.

Another great barrier between Indian and British society was the custom of **purdah**, which required Hindu and Muslim women in families of any means to live in seclusion, forbidden to see men other than close relatives. British women who visited Indian women in purdah found they had little in common to talk about.

Yet these differences in customs were probably not the major reason for the division between British and Indian society. More significant was the assumption on the part of most of the British in India that Indians were an "inferior race." The British also thought that if they mixed too much in Indian society, the confidence of the Indians in British rule would be undermined.

Hindu and Muslim women lived in purdah, or seclusion, never interacting with men other than close relatives. When in public, they wore veils from head to foot. Today, educated Indian women consider the custom outmoded, but purdah survives in the countryside.



Language

India's Language Dilemma

Even after the nationalist movement won India's independence from Britain in 1947, the influence of the British Raj was felt in many areas of Indian life. One was the new nation's choice to use both English and Hindi as official languages. Hindi, a language based on the ancient Sanskrit language, is spoken by about 325 million people, mainly in north and central India. This makes Hindi the most widely spoken of India's many languages—but does not make it welcome to those Indians with a language of their own.

Some 14 different regional languages are officially recognized by India's constitution. Many, like Hindi, are based on classical Sanskrit. Each of these languages has millions of speakers. Some, such as Bengali, have long cultural and literary traditions as well.

This great diversity in Indian languages seemed to make English a practical choice for communication among speakers from differ-

ent regions. India's leaders in the early years of independence intended to phase out English gradually and make Hindi the only national language. Minority linguistic groups, however, protested violently. Many Indian authors wrote in English; other Indians found English useful in their education and careers. They wanted the two-language system to continue.

For some nationalists, though, speaking and writing English was a nagging reminder of colonialism. By 1990, "language nationalists" in several large states in India had begun to demand that Hindi be declared the nation's only official language. The issue threatened to divide the country. Speakers of minority Indian languages still bitterly opposed any such change. Many educators and writers also defended the use of English. One called the language "England's greatest bequest to India."

The question of language. Despite their bias, the British believed the Indians were capable of learning from their rulers. As you read on page 53, they hoped to "improve" the Indian people through westernization. When the British government in India drew up a plan for education in 1835, its officials debated whether Indian students should be taught in English or in Sanskrit (an ancient language of India) or in Arabic (the language of Islam). The British historian Thomas Macaulay summarized the findings of a committee that studied the question:

☞ I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic—but I have done what I could to form

a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their [knowledge of those languages]. . . . I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. . . .

How, then, stands the case? We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to [review]. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West. . . .

"... Of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects."

—Thomas Macaulay

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Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia—communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire.

Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country [India], we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects. ⁹⁹

(1) Was the committee that decided the official language of India unbiased in its judgments? Why or why not? (2) Why did Macaulay consider it important for Indians to learn English?

It was true that if Indians hoped to do well under the Raj, they needed to know English. The higher courts conducted their business in English, as did the civil service. Also, India had no standard language that was understood by everyone on the subcontinent. Many dialects were spoken, including Hindi in the north, Bengali in Bengal, and Urdu in the Punjab. Having English as the official language made political organization and business matters run more smoothly.

But even knowing English and following European customs was not enough to gain entrance into British society. The reality of not being European remained an obstacle to any Indian who sought success in Western society.

Continuing barriers. In the 1920's, after World War I, the British began to make more attempts to mix socially with the Indians, but the boundaries did not disappear. British women organized so-called "purdah parties" that enabled Indian women to meet them without breaking purdah. Since British and Indian women rarely spoke each other's languages well, these meetings were not often repeated.



Polo, thought to have originated in ancient Persia 4,000 years ago, is played on horseback by two teams of four people. Its basic rules are similar to those of hockey. The modern version of polo was first played in the Punjab region of India in 1862, when a group of British officers copied the sport from tribal horsemen.

Some Indian officers were hesitantly admitted to some of the British clubs. The writer Paul Scott based many of his novels on the life of the British in India. In his novel *The Jewel in the Crown* he gave the following explanation of customs in a British club:

⁶⁶ If you look through the pages [of the club's guest book], you will see the signatures of one or two Indian members. But they were of course all officers who held the King-Emperor's commission. . . .

The committee [officials] were rather in a quandary when . . . Indian officers first began to turn up in Mayapore. It was always accepted that any officer on the station should automatically become a member. Indeed it was compulsory for him to pay his subscription [dues] whether he ever entered the place or not. And you could not keep him out if he

was an Indian because that would have been an insult to the King's uniform. . . .

In any case the Indian officers more or less solved the problem themselves by limiting their visits to appearances on the tennis courts. One was never known to swim in the pool, seldom to enter the bar, never to dine. . . . An Indian who sought and obtained a commission knew what problems he was likely to encounter. Usually it was enough for him to know that he couldn't actually be blackballed at the gymkhana* merely because he was an Indian, and enough for the English members to know that he was unlikely to put in any prolonged or embarrassing appearance. 99

(1) In Scott's account, why were club officials forced to admit Indians? (2) What does this passage tell you about the position of Indians in British society?

* An area set aside for horse racing and other equestrian events.

Section 2 Review

1. **Define or identify:** caste, Indian Civil Service, boxwallah, ayah, purdah.
2. What social divisions existed in British colonial society?
3. What effect did the Indian climate have on the British colonization of India?
4. What customs divided Indians from British people?
5. Why did Indians need to learn English if they wanted to get ahead in British India?
6. **Critical thinking:** What was probably the most significant barrier separating Indian and British people? Why?

SECTION 3/The Growth of Indian Nationalism

Focus Questions

- How was there a revival of interest and pride in Indian culture? (pages 62-64)
- How did the Indian nationalist movement develop and gather strength? (pages 64-67)

Terms to Know

Bengali renaissance
Brahmo Samaj
secular government
communal representation
Morley-Minto Reforms
Amritsar Massacre
Satyagraha

The British had always said that Western education was necessary to prepare the people of India for self-government. At some point in the reassuringly distant future, they believed, Britain would grant India home rule. Beginning in the late 1800's, however, the British were startled to find that the Indians were acting to hasten that day. Indians used their command of English and their knowledge of government to launch an energetic campaign for independence.

In 1917 a former Secretary of State for India, John Morley, said of the Indian nationalist movement, "It was no question of the terrible military mutiny of half a century ago repeating itself. The danger arose from a mutiny, not of sepoys about greased cartridges, but of educated men armed with modern ideas supplied from the noblest arsenals and proudest trophies of English literature and English oratory."

Renewed Interest in Indian Culture

English-language education and the printing press were enormously significant Western influences on Indian culture. The printing press allowed Indians to circulate their own writings more widely than ever before and to start newspapers. The English language brought new political and cultural currents to India, and Indian writers responded eagerly to those new ideas. They chose to use the language of their conquerors to defend the unique identity of their country.

Cultural revival. In the early 1800's, Indian poets and prose writers in Bengal began a movement known as the **Bengali renaissance**. Most of these writers were Hindu, and they wrote in English. They defended the worth of Indian culture and the right of Bengal to govern itself. The movement lasted through the nineteenth century.

The pioneer of the Bengali renaissance was Rammohun Roy, a Bengali reformer whose writings helped Indians develop a sense of national identity. He founded the **Brahmo Samaj** (sah-MAHJ) movement, which was an attempt to meet the challenge of Christianity by incorporating much of its ethics into a reformed Hinduism. The members of this movement accepted the humanitarian message of Christianity, but they asserted their right to be Hindus. They were partly moved by the widespread fear that the aim of the British was eventually to convert all of India to Christianity.

In Hinduism there is no clear separation between religion and society, and the idea of **secular government** (government separated from religion) was not easy for Hindus to accept. Members of the Brahmo Samaj saw the British Raj as a Christian government. Christian missionaries had started many mission schools in India in the early nineteenth century, and children in these schools had daily Bible lessons along with their other studies. In 1823 Rammohun Roy defended the right of Bengalis to practice their religion without interference:

"The danger arose from a mutiny, not of sepoys about greased cartridges, but of educated men armed with modern ideas . . ."

—John Morley

For a period of upwards of fifty years, this country [Bengal] has been in the exclusive possession of the English nation. During the first thirty years, from the word and deed [of the English] it was universally believed that they

would not interfere with the religion of their subjects. . . .

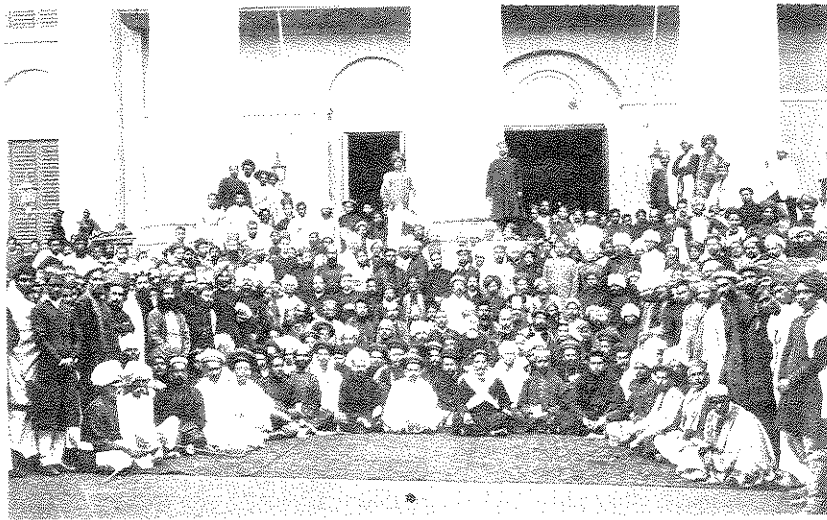
But during the last twenty years, a body of English gentlemen who are called missionaries have been publicly endeavoring . . . to convert Hindus and Muslims of this country to Chris-

tianity. The first way is that of publishing and distributing among the natives various books, large and small, reviling both religions, and abusing and ridiculing [their] gods and saints. . . . The second way is that of standing in front of the doors of the natives or in public roads to preach the excellency of that of other [religions]. The third way is that if any natives of low origin become Christians from the desire of gain or from any other motives, these gentlemen employ and maintain them as a necessary encouragement to others to follow their example.

It is true that the apostles of Jesus Christ used to preach the superiority of the Christian religion to the natives of different countries. But we must recollect that they were not the rulers of those countries where they preached. . . . In Bengal, where the English are the sole rulers, and where the mere name of Englishman is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of the poor, timid, and humble inhabitants and upon their religion cannot be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act.⁹⁹

(1) According to Rammohun Roy's account, how did missionaries try to convert Indians to Christianity? (2) Why did he think it was unfair of the British to try to convert the Indians to Christianity?

Another important figure in the Bengali renaissance was Rabindranath Tagore (tuh-GOR), a poet and prose writer who won the Nobel Prize for Liter-



At first the Indian National Congress set modest goals, but by 1897, when this photograph was taken, some members had begun to call for independence from Britain.

ature in 1913. Tagore wrote most of his works in the Bengali language and then translated them into English. He was a strong nationalist as well as a champion of traditional Hindu culture. Yet he did not completely reject British culture. Some Indian writers complained that the Indian languages were absorbing too many English words, but Tagore did not object. He said, "Languages grow and take words from other languages. English is a very beautiful language, and there's no reason why we should not take words from that language."

A cultural revival also took root in the south of India, where the English reformer named Annie Besant (BEZ-unt) was a leader in the Madras Theosophical Society. Theosophy was a philosophical system based on a belief in mystical insights into the nature of God. It had strong links with Hinduism. For many intellectual Hindus it represented confirmation that their culture was good enough to be borrowed from by Western culture.

Annie Besant, a great admirer of India, became an important nationalist leader. An Indian follower of theosophy named Sankara Menon said of Annie Besant: "Before Gandhi, she was the greatest encourager of national culture, the national spirit. She established schools and colleges all over India, where the emphasis was on patriotism, living the simple Indian life, [and] cultivating Indian values."

The Indian Nationalist Movement

In 1885 an important step was taken on the road to Indian self-determination. In that year nationalist

leaders established the Indian National Congress (page 572). The leaders of the organization had moderate aims. They wanted Indians to take part in the existing structure of government, but they did not call for independence, nor did they try to overturn British rule. All the Indian nationalist leaders had Western educations, and one of the most famous of them, Dadabhai Naoroji (now-ROH-jee), lived in London. Naoroji spent 50 years lobbying the British government and public, demanding that Indians should be given the same rights and privileges as other British subjects. In 1880 Naoroji wrote the following memorandum to the Secretary of State for India. In it he argued against the British practice of keeping Indians out of higher posts in the Indian government:

Europeans occupy almost all the higher places in every department of government. . . . While in India they acquire India's money, experience, and wisdom, and when they go, they carry both away with them, leaving India so much poorer in material and moral wealth. Thus India is left without, and cannot have, those elders in wisdom and experience, who in every country are the natural guides of the rising generations in their national and social conduct, and of the destinies of their country. What a sad, sad loss this is! . . .

The Europeans are not the natural leaders of the people. They do not belong to the people. They cannot enter into their thoughts and feelings; they cannot join or sympathize with their joys or griefs. On the contrary, every day

the estrangement is increasing. Europeans deliberately and openly widen it more and more. There may be very few social institutions started by Europeans in which natives, however fit and desirous to join, are not deliberately and insultingly excluded.

The Europeans are and make themselves strangers in every way. All they effectually do is to eat the substance of India, material and moral, while living there, and when they go, they carry away all they have acquired, and their pensions and future usefulness besides. [99]

(1) In Naoroji's opinion, what situation was "leaving India . . . poorer in material and moral wealth"? (2) Why did he think the British were not the natural leaders of the people?

Moderates like Naoroji were not the only leaders of the Indian nationalist movement. There were also extremists like the fiery journalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak (TEE-lahk), who used his newspaper *Kesari* ("the Lion") to remind his readers of the ancient glories of Hinduism. Tilak urged the Indian people to fight for independence, telling them to model themselves on Shivaji, a chieftain who had defied the Mogul Empire. Such appeals to the Hindu heritage of course tended to alienate Muslims, who took pride in the past glories of Mogul India.

The Muslim League. The Indian nationalist movement was mainly a Hindu movement. At first the Indian National Congress had some Muslim members. Within 20 years of its founding, however, the Congress had become more vocal and aggressive. As a result, the Muslims began to feel less in tune with the aims of the Congress.

The leaders of the Congress now wanted India to be a parliamentary democracy, independent of British rule. Such a government would be based on majority rule. Since Muslims made up only 70 million of India's 300 million people, this goal made them uneasy. Muslims began to fear that if independence was won, they might find themselves a minority without the full rights of citizenship.

To protect their rights in a future self-governing India, Muslim leaders formed the Muslim League in 1906 (page 572). Mohammed Ali Jinnah soon be-



Mohammed Ali Jinnah advocated the formation of a separate Muslim state. This goal became a reality in 1947 with the creation of Pakistan.

came its leader and remained so until his death in 1948. In addition to safeguarding their interests, members of the Muslim League aimed to promote the idea of **communal representation**. This was a plan to reserve a certain number of political offices for each religious and ethnic group. As India moved closer to independence, the Muslim League also worked to establish a separate Muslim state.

The boycott as a weapon. As the nationalist movement gained strength in India, extremists used terrorism against British officials. Moderates opted for nonviolent weapons, such as boycotts and protests. A serious Indian grievance against the British rule was the British monopoly of the market for textiles. The Indian market was flooded with British-made cloth, while high import duties prevented the sale of Indian cloth in England. The monopoly had almost destroyed the Indian textile industry. In 1904 the nationalists organized their first boycott of British-made cloth. This would later prove to be one of the most powerful tools in the Indian struggle for independence.

Political changes. The British did make an effort to respond to the Indian call for change. In

1909 laws called the **Morley-Minto Reforms** were enacted. These laws gave Indian property owners the right to vote for members of legislative councils. The reforms also allowed Muslims to be represented in the new councils. The leaders of the Indian National Congress denounced this plan as an attempt by the British to stir up religious strife. They claimed that the British were trying to use tension between Hindus and Muslims as an excuse to prolong their rule. Some moderates, on the other hand, said the new laws were at least a step in the direction of creating a greater Indian voice in government.

In 1919, following the end of World War I, the British enacted additional reforms in the Indian government. Indian members were added to the viceroy's council, and Indian voters were allowed to elect some members of a new two-house legislature. Voters also gained the right to choose members of legislatures in the provinces.

Despite these moves toward giving Indians more voice in their country's affairs, the viceroy and the governors of the provinces still had the last word. To Indian nationalists, therefore, the reforms were a serious disappointment. In the words of Mohandas Gandhi, a rising nationalist leader, the "beneficent institutions of the British government are like the fabled snake with a brilliant jewel in its head, but which has fangs full of poison. . . ."

The Amritsar Massacre. Adding to growing resentment were laws passed by the British to suppress political agitation. Soon after the end of World War I, radical nationalists had carried out acts of violence to show their hatred of British rule. In reprisal the British government passed laws that made it legal for British authorities to arrest Indians accused of political crimes and to hold secret trials of these prisoners. The denial of legal counsel and of trial by jury seemed to Western-educated Indians to be an outrageous violation of British traditions of protection of individual rights. Widespread protests led to rioting in some places.

Because of the tension that had built up, public meetings were banned in some cities. In April 1919 thousands of Indians gathered for a Hindu religious festival in a public square in the city of Amritsar. The great majority of the people were unaware of the ban on public meetings. An army officer, seeing

the meeting as defiance of the ban, ordered his soldiers to open fire on the crowd. Over 300 people were killed and more than 1,000 wounded in what became known as the **Amritsar Massacre**.

This tragedy so angered the Indian people that it fueled nationalist sentiment for years to come. An Indian woman named Shiva Dua remembered the effect it had on her as a young girl:

☞ I was very, very small when I heard this, about five. I remember having gone there [Amritsar] as a child, along with a large number of volunteers from the school where my sister was principal. The girls sang a song which said: "We will never be vanquished, even if we have to lay down our lives for the sake of the country."

Then we were taken to the [park where the massacre happened] and I was literally picked up and shown the bullet-marks in the walls. We brought blood-stained, red earth back . . . , and my sister said: "This is a sacred thing. It has to be kept in a silver casket. And every day it will be your duty to put flowers on it. Early in the morning, this will be your first duty. . . ."

Soon after that there was a sort of fair, with toys and all kinds of things. My father gave me some money and said: "Go and buy anything you like." I went round and came back and said: "I want this book." It was called *The Punjab Massacre*, a small book in Hindi about [Amritsar]. He didn't want me to buy it, because I was five at that time, and he said: "What will you do with this book?" I said: "I want to read it." It cost only eight annas, and I bought it. At the age of five, I went through that book, not once, but many times. ☞

(1) Judging from Shiva Dua's account, how do you think the Amritsar Massacre influenced young Indian nationalists? (2) What effect do tragedies like this have on any political movement?

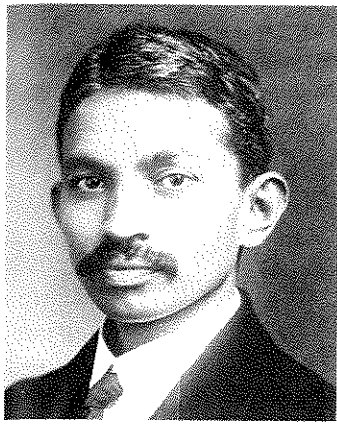
Gandhi's leadership. It was the Amritsar Massacre that set the stage for the emergence of Mohandas Gandhi as the leader of the nationalist movement. He had been inclined to accept the political reforms of 1919, but when the government failed to punish the officers responsible for the killings at Amritsar, Gandhi changed his

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Gandhi abandoned Western dress (above) after he decided to oppose British rule. He urged Indians to return to traditional ways, and he set an example by spinning thread (right) and weaving cloth.



mind. He urged the Indian National Congress to follow a policy of noncooperation with the British government.

Gandhi's advice that the Congress use noncooperation as a strategy against the British was an outgrowth of his intensely spiritual approach to political activity. In his teachings Gandhi combined the Hindu belief in fasting, self-discipline, duty to family and self, and reincarnation with the Christian teaching to "love your neighbor." After years of political efforts to end racial discrimination and injustice, Gandhi developed the principle of **Satyagraha** (SUH-tyah-grah-ha), a term derived from two Hindi words meaning "spiritual truth" and "strength." Translated as "Soul Force," Satyagraha was taught by Gandhi as a way to search for truth and social justice through love, suffering, and nonviolent resistance.

The Congress followed Gandhi's recommendation. In September 1920, it passed a resolution of noncooperation, urging all Indians to boycott foreign goods, to stay away from government schools, and to refuse to take part in elections. Gandhi's aim was to force the British to leave India but without violence. He also hoped to use his moral influence to calm the religious tensions that were turning Hindus and Muslims against each other.

Organized resistance by the Indian National Congress against the British Raj resulted in greater political power for the Indian people. In 1935 passage of the Government of India Act created a new constitution for India. In addition to strengthening parliamentary institutions in the provinces, the constitution gave each province control over its own legislation. The 1935 Government of India Act set the stage for India's future and established a framework for independence.

Section 3 Review

1. **Define or identify:** Bengali renaissance, Brahma Samaj, secular government, communal representation, Morley-Minto Reforms, Amritsar Massacre, Satyagraha.
2. Why did many Indians view Christianity as a threat to Hindu culture?
3. What were the aims of the Indian National Congress?
4. Why did Muslim leaders form the Muslim League?
5. **Critical thinking:** How did a renewed interest in Indian culture support the aims of Indian nationalism?