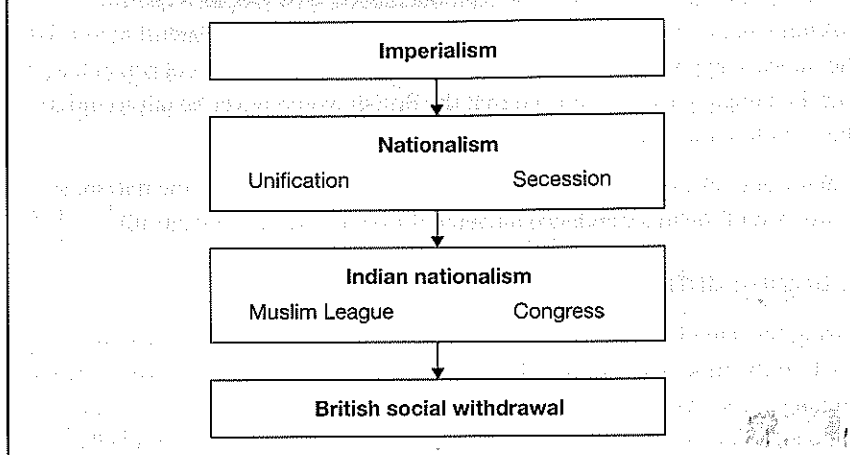


Summary diagram: Imperialism and the growth of nationalism



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

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

1 India and the First World War

- ▶ What was India's military involvement in the war?
- ▶ What impact did the war have on India's economy?

Competition among the imperial powers turned into bloody conflict across Europe between 1914 and 1918. Thousands of Indians volunteered for military service, politicians pledged their loyalty and India made the largest contribution to the war effort from the British Empire. A total of 210,000 sepoys and 80,000 British Indian Army soldiers went overseas, leaving just 15,000 troops to maintain order in a country the size of Europe. The experience of war was to have a significant effect on the people and economy of India.

The Indian response to war

Although not fighting to defend its homeland, it was apparent that the supreme global power of Britain was under threat. It was contesting with equally powerful forces and an easy victory was soon dismissed. Britain's alliance with Russia (and France) meant that a wartime threat to India from the north was inconceivable. However, in the event of Britain's defeat, then Russia might march in. This concentrated Indian minds on supporting the British war effort.

On the other hand, even in the event of victory, the war would be likely to have weakened Britain's power, creating much more favourable conditions for the nationalist movement.

It was, of course, not immediately obvious that the conflict would be a world war (nor indeed just the first). It involved nations with global empires but the predominant theatre of war was Europe, and the Western Front across Belgium and France in particular. Accordingly, Indian troops were transported to Europe to fight Germany (and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and to the Middle East to attack the Ottoman Empire (ruled by the Turks), which had allied itself to Germany. The effect of the soldiers' experiences on Indian public opinion was significant.

Indian military experiences and contribution

The moral high ground of the white man's burden turned into the blood-soaked swamp of trench warfare. To the Indians, the carnage of the Great War was proof that the Europeans were no better and perhaps worse than those they ruled. Indeed, the fighting between white European neighbours (and the family kinship of the German Kaiser, the Russian Tsar and the King-Emperor of Britain) could be described in the same terms as 'communal' fighting between Indian Hindus and Muslims.

European barbarity was aggravated by the incompetence of the major campaign involving Indian troops in **Mesopotamia** against the Turks in 1915. The British

KEY TERM

Mesopotamia The Middle East, especially what is now Iraq, from the Greek for 'between rivers' (the Tigris and Euphrates in Iraq).

had been drawn into the Mesopotamian campaign by French and Russian desires to break up the Ottoman Empire. There was great British reluctance to go to war against this Islamic empire because of the possible reaction within India. However, it was strategically important to prevent the oil pipelines at Abadan (Persia), which supplied the Royal Navy, from falling to the Turks.

The troops were underequipped and badly led. Indian industry, underdeveloped in the imperialist system, could not at first produce weapons or vehicles and the British could not afford to divert supplies from the European war. The campaign, which was financed entirely by taxation on Indians, acquired the nickname the 'Mess-Pot'. Thirteen thousand Indian troops were **besieged** at Kut; 23,000 were killed trying to reach them. Forced to surrender, they were marched off across the desert to Turkey, most of them dying on the way.

Economic impact

The war proved to be hugely costly both in terms of the enormous loss of life and financially. The British government paid for the war economy by borrowing \$4 billion from the USA: the interest on this loan amounted to 40 per cent of government expenditure.

If the war had weakened the British imperial economy, it benefited Indian industry. According to historian Lawrence James, the Indian Tata Iron and Steel Company employed 7000 in 1907, but by 1923 this figure had risen to 30,000, enabling it to increase its output a hundredfold. This growth was largely driven by the need to supply Indian troops fighting in Mesopotamia with equipment and supplies.

There were other opportunities for India. Before the war, cotton, for example, had been farmed in India then shipped to Britain and the manufactured goods sold back to Indians. Economic historian Professor Alan Milward has described this as an example of the 'scaffolding of multilateral settlements, which before 1914 held together the structure of international trade'; in other words, a prime example of imperialist exploitation, resulting in a balance of payments deficit in India. The war diverted shipping from this trade, leading to a lack of cotton in Lancashire, unemployment and the near total collapse of the industry, while the Indian cotton industry was strengthened through finding new customers. By the end of the war, Japan and the USA bought as much Indian cotton as Britain did. In James's words: 'The war had fractured Anglo-Indian economic interdependency and started a trend that would become increasingly pronounced over the next twenty years.'

These changes benefited owners as capitalists (sometimes referred to as war profiteering) but conditions were hard for workers and peasant farmers (*ryots*). Taxation nearly doubled to pay for the Mesopotamian campaign, including the equipment provided by Tata. The cost of food had also risen by 67 per cent by the end of the war. Towards the end of the war, industrial strikes increased

KEY TERM

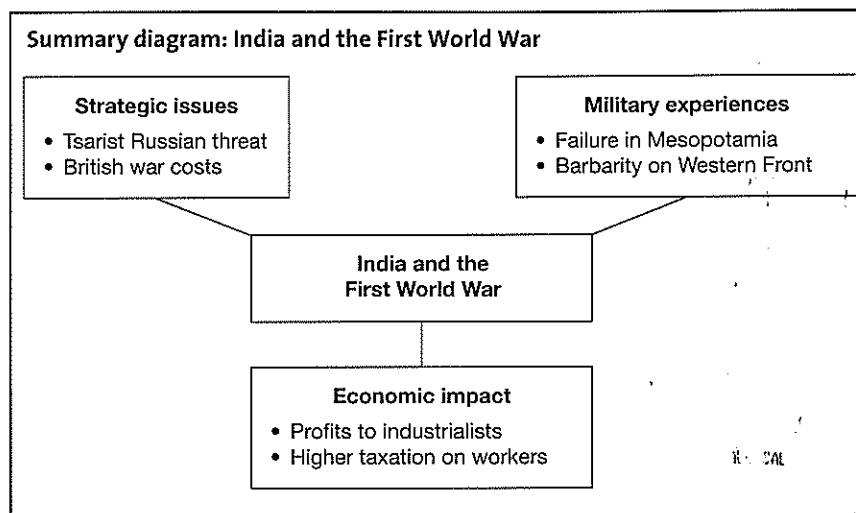
Besieged Surrounded by the enemy but typically within a defensible fortification, creating a long stand-off.

KEY TERM

Pandemic Global epidemic.

dramatically (that is, strikes about wages and conditions rather than political agitation).

Finally, it is worth noting that economic activity was also weakened by the global **pandemic** of Spanish influenza in the winter of 1918–19, which killed more people than the war. India suffered more than any other country: 12.5 million (perhaps even 18 million) Indians died out of 21.5 million in the world as a whole.



2 War and the growth of nationalism

▶ How did the war affect Indian nationalist activity?

Although Indian support for the war was strong, there were reminders that nationalist goals had not been forgotten by either extremists or moderates. The war period witnessed moderate, and collaborative, nationalist agitation and a number of important developments in the growth of Indian nationalism.

The *Ghadr* movement

Most disturbing for the British were a number of mutinies. There were two early mutinies of Pathans in the winter of 1914–15, apparently caused by fear that they would be led by Muslim officers. Indian troops in Singapore had learned from reports and personal letters about the death toll at the Battle of the Somme (1916). A rumour that they were to embark for France led to a rampage and the killing of European civilians, including women. One woman wrote later of the incident that she thought the horrors of the 1857 mutiny were about to be

repeated. In fact, order was quickly established and 37 ringleaders were publicly executed.

The most politically significant mutiny never actually took place. In early 1914 a Japanese steamer, the *Komagata Maru*, was commissioned by more than 300 Sikhs working in Malaya (present-day Malaysia) to take them to Canada. When the ship arrived in Vancouver, the Canadians refused entry despite the voyage complying with new anti-Asian immigration laws. After months in harbour, the *Komagata Maru* was forced to set sail for Calcutta.

By the time it arrived in India, in September 1914, war had broken out and suspicions were high. It was known that the Canadian coastal province of British Columbia was home to a growing movement of anti-British Indians. The movement gave its name – *Ghadr* – to a newspaper widely distributed in North America and the East, which had the subtitle ‘enemy of the British government’.

When the steamer docked, the Sikhs found troops waiting to escort them to a holding camp. Some made a break for the city and 22 were shot. The rest were rounded up and transported across India. The incident inflamed anti-British feeling in the Punjab, still more so when an official inquiry blamed the immigrant Sikhs.

Subsequently, British secret police paid close attention to politics in the Punjab. Inside information led to the break-up of a planned uprising in 1915. Five thousand Ghadrites were arrested, 200 were jailed or transported abroad and 46 were hanged. The relief and satisfaction of the British was haunted by the realisation that the traditional loyalty of the Punjab (compared with the continuous agitation of Bengal) could no longer be counted on. Just four years later, this anxiety would lead to the worst atrocity of British rule in India.

Home rule leagues

Origins

In 1916 two new political organisations were launched. Both had the aim of campaigning for home rule for India (and had almost identical names). One was led by the ejected Congress radical Tilak; the other by a forceful 69-year-old British woman called **Annie Besant**.

The home rule leagues were based closely on the campaigns for home rule in Ireland in the late nineteenth century. An Irish parliamentary party had been formed to work democratically for self-government in Ireland while remaining part of the British Empire. It took four attempts between 1886 and 1914 for an Irish Home Rule Bill to become law and even then it was suspended because of the outbreak of war. There was a significant Irish uprising at Easter 1916.

In the Indian context, this struggle showed that home rule was a challenging but realistic objective. It could not be dismissed as too easy. Although Congress had discussed home rule since 1905, the control of the moderates had ensured that

KEY TERM

Ghadr Translates as mutiny.

KEY FIGURE

Annie Besant (1847–1933)

Political and religious campaigner, founder of the All-India Home Rule League and president of Congress 1917–18.

it never became a campaign. But Congress had lost momentum and influence since the 1907 split. Besant tried at first to work with Congress and revive its fortunes, but she soon realised that Congress was only interested in controlling and suppressing the home rule movement.

SOURCE A

From Mrs Besant's speech as president of Congress, December 1917, quoted in *The Thirty-Second Indian National Congress Calcutta*, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1917, pp. 22–34.

India demands Home Rule for two reasons, one essential and vital, the other less important but weighty: First because Freedom is the birthright of every Nation: secondly, because her most important interests are now made subservient to the interests of the British Empire without her consent, and her resources are not utilised for her greatest needs. It is enough only to mention the money spent on her Army, not for local defence but for Imperial purposes, as compared with that spent on primary education.

Home rule

Home rule was not revolutionary. Indeed, the term was adopted, in the opinion of one nationalist, N.C. Kelkar, because it was 'familiar to the English ear and saved them from all the imaginary terrors which the word *swaraj* was likely to conjure up in their minds'.

Home rule would only involve management of internal Indian affairs. Defence and foreign policy would remain matters for the British government. Besant stated that it meant 'freedom without separation'; Tilak emphasised that it sought 'reform of the system of administration and not the overthrow of government'. It was certainly not intended to harm the war effort. Tilak himself stated in 1917: 'If you want Home Rule be prepared to defend your Home ... You cannot reasonably say that the ruling will be done by you and the fighting for you.'

Success

Tilak's Home Rule League for India rapidly gained 32,000 members despite being focused on just the two regions of Maharashtra and Karnataka. Besant's All-India Home Rule League was smaller and grew more slowly but its network of committees covered most of the rest of India. The two were mutually supportive: Tilak and Besant joined each other's organisations. They toured the country giving public lectures and publishing pamphlets. They successfully generated agitation among the public in a way that Congress had never really tried.

Responses

Two future national leaders, Jinnah and **Jawaharlal Nehru**, joined the leagues but Gandhi refused, saying: 'Mrs Besant, you are distrustful of the British; I am not, and I will not help in any agitation against them during the war.'

? In what ways do Besant's two contrasting arguments in Source A pose criticisms of the British?

KEY TERM

Swaraj Translates as self-rule.

KEY FIGURE

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964)

Up-and-coming nationalist figure, later Congress leader and prime minister of independent India.

Gandhi's view would soon change dramatically. Other Indian groups were also resistant, especially Muslims and lower-caste Hindu groups who thought that self-government would entrench Brahmin Hindu dominance. They viewed the British as more protective of their interests.

The British regarded the home rule leagues with great concern. They had finally calmed the agitation caused by the partition of Bengal by reuniting it in 1911 and liked the tame approach of the moderate-controlled Congress. One official reported: 'Moderate leaders can command no support among the vocal classes who are being led at the heels of Tilak and Besant.'

Orders were given for the swift arrest of home rule campaigners whenever possible. Students were forbidden from holding meetings at which home rule might be discussed. Tilak was arrested on charges of sedition and required to put up 40,000 **rupees** as **surety** of good behaviour. Besant was actually **interned**.

These moves were completely counter-productive. Congress moderates now swung their support over to home rule campaigns. The concerns of the new viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, are shown in Source B.

SOURCE B

From a letter by the viceroy to the secretary of state, quoted in S.R. Mehrotra, *Towards India's Freedom and Partition*, Vikas Publishing, 1978, pp. 132–3.

Mrs Besant, Tilak and the others are fomenting with great vigour the agitation for immediate home rule and in the absence of any definite announcement by the government of India as to their policy in the matter, it is attracting many of those who hitherto have held less advanced views.

Consequences

When Besant was freed, she was triumphantly elected president of Congress in December 1917. There were great hopes for the reunification and revival of Congress. However, she proved an inconsistent and ineffective leader. Crucially, she was reluctant to support any kind of boycott or resistance campaign. Tilak still refrained from rejoining Congress.

The home rule movement quickly lost momentum and, strictly speaking, it failed to achieve its objectives. However, it had created the first truly national mass campaign. Moreover, its failure left an unsatisfied willingness among the general population for more direct action. This is widely believed to have prepared the way for the campaigns of Gandhi from the 1920s onwards.

The Lucknow Pact

The home rule agitation had somewhat bridged the distance between Congress and the Muslim League. At the Congress meeting of December 1916 in Lucknow, a historic agreement was reached, ending what Congress president A.C. Mazumdar described as 'ten years of painful separation ... misunderstandings and the mazes of unpleasant controversies'.

KEY TERMS

Rupee The currency of India.

Surety A deposit lost in the event of breaking the law.

Interned Imprisoned without trial.

? What reason is given in Source B for increasing support for home rule movements?

KEY TERM

Pact An agreement between political groups or states.

In 1915 Congress and the Muslim League had held concurrent sessions in Bombay and both had declared self-government as their political objective. During 1916 two committees had worked together to prepare the details of a scheme for how such self-government would work. Concurrent sessions were again held in Lucknow which finalised the so-called Lucknow **Pact**, covering not only a broad statement of political objective but also the precise details of future electorates, once India was self-governing. The sense of occasion was further enhanced by the reintegration of the radical wing of the Congress Party at the same session. Although the scheme was accepted by the two political groups, it was not in their power to bring it about.

Table 2.1 Muslim proportions of provincial populations and planned seats in provincial councils as part of the Lucknow Pact

Province	Muslim population (%)	Planned seats (%)
Punjab	Over 50	50
Bengal	Over 50	40
United Provinces	14	30
Bihar	13	25
Central Provinces	4	15
Madras	7	15
Bombay	20	33.3

The heart of the scheme was the setting of proportions of seats in the provincial legislative councils reserved for Muslims (see Table 2.1). This took forward the precedent created by the Indian Councils Act 1909 (see page 10) of separate communal elections for quotas of seats in the councils. What was remarkable was the extent to which Congress agreed to weighting the representation above the proportion of the actual population in many provinces.

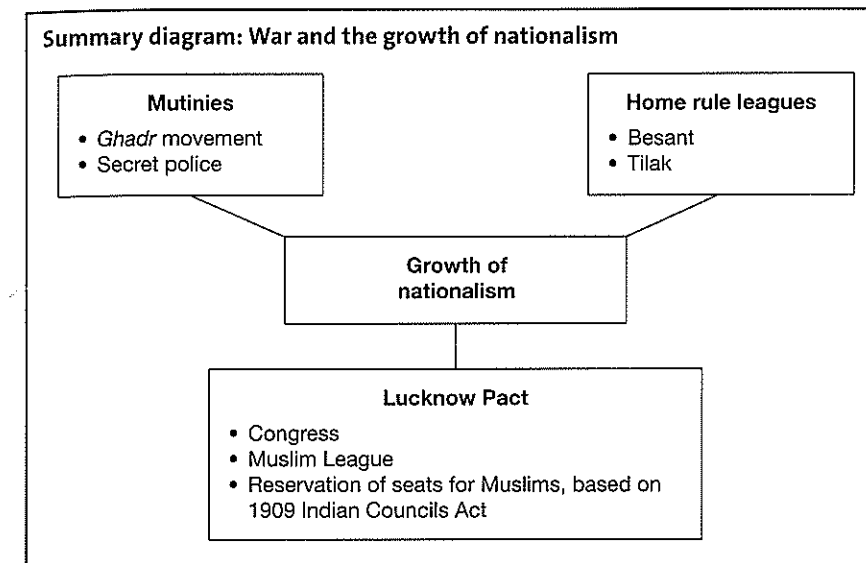
Further communal agreements in the plan included:

- No Muslim would contest a seat outside the reserved quota.
- No bill or clause would proceed if 75 per cent of the affected community opposed it.
- The central Legislative Council would increase to 150 members, of whom 80 per cent would be elected and one-third of them would be Muslim in the proportions set out for the provinces, thus giving Muslims additional weightage at both provincial and central levels.

There were more general agreements, such as:

- Councils would have powers over revenue collection, loans and expenditure.
- Indians would form at least half the members of the Executive Council.
- The judiciary would be independent of the executive, the government of India would be independent of the secretary of state, and the India Council in Britain would be abolished.
- Defence, foreign affairs and diplomacy would remain British responsibilities.

The Muslim League leader Jinnah stated that ‘co-operation in the cause of the motherland should be our guiding principle’. To the British, it seemed that the nationalist movement was reuniting and gaining strength.



3 The effects of the war on British rule

▶ *What impact did the war have on British rule?*

The end of the First World War could have been an opportunity for Britain to reward Indian loyalty and sacrifice. However, the British felt far from secure and could not stop themselves from extending wartime control. The resulting protest led to a massacre which was a turning point for the future of British control over India.

Political consequences of the First World War

The First World War had a number of important political consequences which threatened British security. First, the Russian Revolution in 1917 had resulted in a **Bolshevik** government which had executed Tsar Nicholas II and his family. The Bolsheviks had also withdrawn from a war that they saw as a conflict between imperialists (and royal cousins). The European powers feared the spread of Bolshevism. British soldiers who had expected to return home in peacetime found themselves fighting inside Russia against a new Red Army in the vain hope of killing off the Bolshevik regime. Indian troops were deployed in the **North West Frontier Province** against Russian forces. In Britain, the police

KEY TERMS

Bolshevik The group that emerged as leaders of the Russian Revolution.

North West Frontier Province One of the eleven British provinces of the Raj, adjoining Afghanistan and close to Russia (across the Hindu Kush mountains).

 **KEY TERM**

Fourteen Points US President Wilson's post-war principles of international policy.

formed a Special Branch to spy and report on suspicious political activity. In due course, Special Branch officers in Britain and India would be reporting on Indian independence campaigners.

Second, potential defeat, as German troops from the Russian Front reinforced the Western Front, was averted only by the entry of the USA into the war. This foreshadowed the eclipse of the British Empire by the Americans during the twentieth century. President Woodrow Wilson felt sufficiently supreme to declare his so-called **Fourteen Points** of international policy. These included the right of peoples to independent nationhood. The constant US pressure to apply this principle to the British Empire would have major significance for the British in India.

Third, it was hoped in India, among both British and Indian populations, that the Mesopotamian region would become a British-controlled buffer zone to protect the western approach to India. However, further political factors came into play. Irregular Arab forces (some led by Lawrence of Arabia) had scored minor, but spectacular, successes against Ottoman Turkish forces and supply lines. The British had promised them some form of independence once the Ottoman Empire was broken up. One such consequence was the creation of the Arab state of Iraq. The British in India were dismayed by this whole-hearted support for nationalist demands. How could similar demands within India be denied?

This was compounded by the Balfour Declaration of November 1917. Arthur Balfour, British foreign secretary, gave a contradictory guarantee that: (a) the British would assist in the creation of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine but also (b) the political rights of the existing Arab, mainly Muslim, peoples would not be threatened. This was recognition of a claim by a religious community to be a nation, entitled to its own state. Although Israel did not come into existence until 1948, the political precedent for the Indian, specifically Pakistani, situation would be uncomfortable.

The Montagu Declaration

The British government realised the need to respond to both the Indian war effort and the new nationalist unity. India was permitted its own representatives at the Imperial War Conference of 1917. This gave it a status comparable to the self-governing Dominions of the British Empire. The conference was called to discuss the shape of the eventual political settlement after the expected victory of the Allied powers. When victory was finally achieved, India also took part in the formal peace treaty negotiations.

By 1917 it was also clear to the British that if it wanted to postpone actual political concessions until after the war, it needed to make a statement to counter the home rule movement and the Lucknow Pact. Accordingly, Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India, announced a new constitutional objective in the House of Commons on 20 August (see Source C).

SOURCE C

From the statement by Lord Montagu, secretary of state for India, to the House of Commons, 20 August 1917. Quoted in V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power in India*, Orient Longman, 1957, p. 16.

The Policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are [sic] in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible, and that it is of the highest importance as a preliminary to considering what these steps should be that there should be free and informal exchange of opinion between those in authority at home and in India.

Montagu promptly set off on a massive tour of India to consult politicians and public opinion. His findings were published in the 1918 Montagu–Chelmsford Report, which would become the basis for the 1919 legislation. However, by the time the reforms became law, events at Amritsar in the Punjab would have sealed the fate of the British Empire in India.

The Rowlatt Act

In this insecure state of affairs the British were not inclined to relax their guard in India, despite or perhaps because of the commitment given in the Montagu Declaration. The British government in India had passed the Defence of India Act (1915), permitting them to close down newspapers suspected of anti-British attitudes for the duration of the war. Comparing it with the **Defence of the Realm Act** in Britain, Viceroy Lord Hardinge later boasted that it was 'a far more drastic Dora than her English sister'.

Indians had expected that with the end of the war these measures would become inactive, if not explicitly repealed. In fact, the British quickly moved to renew their powers by passing the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act (1919), now more commonly termed the Rowlatt Act, after its creator.

The Act enabled the powers of the Defence of India Act to be invoked if it was judged that **anarchic** conditions were developing. These powers included unlimited detention without trial, trial without jury and the use of evidence illegal in peacetime. A wide range of activities constituted anarchic behaviour. For example, it was now an offence punishable by two years' imprisonment to possess a copy of a **sedition** newspaper.

All 22 Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council had opposed the bill but the majority, consisting of appointed officials, ensured that it was passed.

The 1919 Hunter Inquiry (see page 30) identified the Rowlatt Act as the most significant grievance of Indians (see Source D).

What does Source C reveal about the commitment of the British government?

 **KEY TERMS**

Defence of the Realm Act British emergency law passed four days after the declaration of war, creating censorship and prohibiting certain activities (including all-day pub opening hours).

Anarchic Without structure, tending towards political chaos.

Seditious Encouraging overthrow of a government.

? Using Sources D and E, how would you describe the attitudes to the Act of the Indian people and the Indian members of the Legislative Council? Do you detect a difference of British attitude in the sources?

SOURCE D

From the report of the committee appointed to investigate disturbances in the Punjab (set up by the British Parliament and chaired by Lord Hunter, commonly referred to as the Hunter Inquiry). Quoted in William Hunter, *Report of Committee Appointed to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab*, Cmd 681, HMSO, 1920, pp. 29–31.

The opposition to the Rowlatt Bills [sic] was very widespread throughout India among both moderate and extreme politicians. It was represented that, on the eve of the grant of a large measure of self-government to India [following the Montagu Declaration], and after the splendid contribution made by her to the winning of the European war, there was no necessity for passing an Act of the character proposed. It was objected that the Act conferred considerable power on the Executive uncontrolled by the Judiciary. It was maintained that the Defence of India Act clothed the Government with all the authority they would get under the new legislation [the Rowlatt Act], and that there was, therefore, every reason for delay and for conceding an adjournment asked by the Indian members of the Legislative Council. The agitation against Government action took an acute form in the months of February and March, both in the press and on public platforms.

However, Viceroy Lord Chelmsford wrote about the Indian members of the Legislative Council (see Source E).

SOURCE E

From a letter to the King-Emperor, 21 May 1919, quoted in P.N. Chopra, Prabha Chopra and Padmsha Jha, *Secret Papers from British Royal Archives*, Konark Publishing, 1998, p. 193.

It was impossible for my Government to ignore [the Rowlatt Commission reporting on extension of the Defence of India Act after the end of the war] and consequently we felt it incumbent upon us to introduce legislation strictly following their recommendations. This legislation was introduced in the February Session of this year in my Legislative Council, and it was immediately evident that we should have the unanimous opposition of all the non-official Indian Members. I must say that the opposition, while unanimous on the surface, was by no means unanimous in reality, for many of the non-official Indian Members expressed privately their conviction that the legislation was necessary but they felt unable to resist the pressure put upon them to oppose these Bills. We felt however that we must face this opposition and that we could not take the grave responsibility of ignoring the weighty recommendations ... and consequently we put the legislation through by means of our official majority. It was clear that the extremist party in India was determined to make what use it could of this legislation as a peg on which to hang a widespread agitation against Government throughout India.

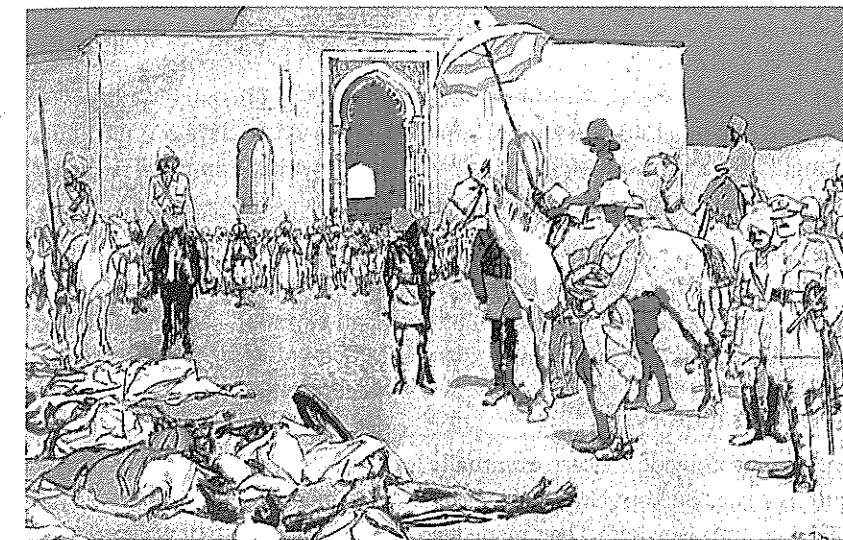
Jinnah resigned from the Council, stating that the Act 'ruthlessly trampled upon the principles for which Great Britain avowedly fought the war'.

KEY TERM

Hartal Translates as strike action, refusal to work.

Gandhi declared it a betrayal of wartime support by Indians and declared a national *hartal* on 6 April 1919, which was widely supported and reinforced the alarming unity of Hindu and Muslim campaigners. The *hartal* turned to widespread violence, not least in the cities of the Punjab, unleashing the terrible events at Amritsar in 1919.

The Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore would later describe the Amritsar Massacre as 'the monstrous progeny of a monstrous war'.

SOURCE F

An unknown artist's impression of the aftermath of the Amritsar Massacre, April 1919.

? How does Source F represent the scale of the Amritsar Massacre?

The Amritsar Massacre

Amritsar is the holy city of the Sikhs at the centre of the Punjab. Punjabis had played a major role in the war, but also in the *Ghadr* movement. There was a strong mood of resentment at the continued repression in the form of the Rowlatt Act. On the British side, there was a renewed fear of uprising and mutiny.

The Jallianwala Bagh meeting

Congress declared another *hartal* for 8 April 1919, which was widely supported but led to violent attacks on people and buildings. On 10 April a mob killed five Englishmen and left an Englishwoman for dead. The Punjab provincial government requested military assistance and control.

Troops under the command of General Dyer arrived in Amritsar on the evening of 11 April. Dyer banned all public meetings and arrested local politicians. Dyer was determined not to repeat the accepted error of the 1857 mutiny by letting events get out of control. As he explained later, he was even more determined to teach the Punjabis a lesson.

Dyer's ban was defied by a public meeting on 13 April in the Jallianwala Bagh. This was an open space within the town that had originally been a set of gardens, but was now enclosed on all sides by the backs of buildings and a high wall. Between 10,000 and 20,000 Punjabis were crammed into the garden when Dyer arrived with Indian troops. He also had an armoured car with a machine gun on top. It is a small mercy that this was unable to enter the garden because the alleyway was too small.

Dyer's troops ran in, took up line position and, without warning, started firing into the crowd. There were only three or four other, very narrow, exits. Panic ensued and people were crushed together. Dyer interpreted this as the gathering of a charge and directed fire into the thickest groups. His troops used over 1600 bullets and only stopped firing because the ammunition ran out. Dyer later confirmed that had there been more ammunition he would have continued the onslaught. It is accepted that 379 people were killed within minutes. The 1200 wounded were left to fend for themselves.

In the days that followed, Dyer imposed **martial law** and humiliating punishments. Public floggings were held of Indians suspected, but not convicted, of violence. In the street where an Englishwoman had been attacked, Indians were forced to crawl along the ground.

The Hunter Inquiry

British and worldwide concern eventually forced the government to hold an inquiry, chaired by Lord Hunter. In various statements to the Hunter Inquiry committee and elsewhere, Dyer made it abundantly clear that: 'It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd but one of producing a sufficient moral effect, from a military point of view, not only on those who were present, but more especially throughout the Panjab. There could be no question of undue severity.'

Dyer maintained that the situation was on the verge of complete mob challenge to the British authority in India and a threat to the lives of Europeans. In this view, he was clearly supported by British public opinion, to the lasting disgust of Indians. The House of Lords passed a vote of thanks for Dyer's actions and a public subscription raised thousands of pounds in reward. By contrast, Rabindranath Tagore repudiated his own knighthood.

The inquiry report identified that the Rowlatt Act was 'largely, if not mainly, responsible for creating the feeling against the Government which promoted such serious disorder in the Punjab' but listed the following additional causes of the incident:

- arrest of Gandhi and general unrest
- home rule activity
- restrictions resulting from the Defence of India Act
- press criticism

- false rumours
- passive resistance
- **satyagraha**
- peace terms with Turkey
- high prices.

It specifically ruled out conspiracy.

The inquiry committee was split along ethnic lines. The majority report held Dyer responsible but only **censured** him. The minority report of the three Indian members of the inquiry blamed martial law for the agitation and compared Dyer's actions to the brutality of the Germans during the war.

Even to the majority, it was inexcusable that Dyer did not attempt to prevent the meeting coming together and that he agreed that he could have dispersed the crowd without firing but would have 'looked a fool'.

Dyer's weak excuses, on top of his declared aim of terrorising the entire Punjab, have led some nationalist writers to claim that the massacre was planned. There is no evidence of this but in any case it was certainly a terrible misjudgement because the moral authority of the British was forever broken. Never again could the British claim to be ruling India with the aim of developing civilised public values or even that they governed by the rule of law.

The inquiry report concluded rather drily: 'The employment of excessive measures is likely as not to produce the opposite result to that desired.' Gandhi declared more forcefully: 'co-operation in any shape or form with this satanic government is sinful'. The freedom struggle was reinvigorated. In the view of historian Percival Spear, Dyer believed his actions were saving the Empire but Amritsar spelled the end of the Raj.

Government of India Act 1919

The Montagu–Chelmsford Report of 1918 led to the Government of India Act 1919, more commonly known as the Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms (or even Mont–Ford Reforms). The provisions of the Act were implemented in 1921.

In the British view, this showed that the government was clearly following through the promise of the 1917 Montagu Declaration. To Indians, however, the four years from declaration to implementation contrasted significantly with the weeks taken to pass the repressive Rowlatt Act. Moreover, coming just eight months after the Amritsar Massacre, there was little feeling of success, let alone gratitude.

The Act contained three significant features:

- self-government in the future
- changes to the composition of councils and the electorate
- division of governmental responsibilities.

KEY TERM

Martial law Military government, where the army imposes its own rules and suspends civil courts and justice.

KEY TERMS

Satyagraha Translates as truth-force, a term coined by Gandhi to describe non-violent protest.

Censure A formal political reprimand.

? How does Source G characterise British authority?

SOURCE G



'Progress to Liberty – Amritsar style.' A newspaper cartoon by David Low published in *The Star*, 16 December 1919.

Self-government

The Act confirmed the promise of eventual self-government of India by an Indian Parliament. It promised a review in ten years' time of the success of the actual changes in the Act. Then a decision about the next move to Dominion status might be taken. It made no reference to independence from Britain at any time.

Councils and electorates

The most significant feature in this area was the elimination of the majorities of appointed officials in most legislative councils. For the first time, members elected by Indians would be in the majority.

At the very top, the Imperial Executive Council was increased to six members, of whom three would be (appointed) Indians, plus the viceroy and the commander-in-chief.

The two houses of the central legislature comprised the (lower) Legislative Assembly, in which 106 members would be elected and 40 nominated, and the (higher) Council of State, which would have 61 members (elected by the wealthiest individuals).

The provincial Legislative Councils were expanded so that 70 per cent of members were elected. All provinces now had full governors and executive councils.

With regard to the electorate, the national **franchise** was extended according to levels of property tax, in other words, to wealthy males. Out of a population of some 150 million people, 5 million were able to vote for provincial councils, 1 million for the Legislative Assembly and just 17,000 for the Council of State.

Furthermore, the principle of separate candidates and electorates was firmly embedded. As well as general electorates, in which all those enfranchised could vote, there were 'reserved' elections of Muslim, Sikh and Christian members by their own electorates (subject still to the property qualification). There were also special electorates for universities (as in Britain until 1950), landholders and business interests.

SOURCE H

From *The Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms*, Cmd 9109, HMSO, 1918, pp. 229–31.

Division by creeds and classes means the creation of political camps organised against each other, and teaches men to think as partisans and not as citizens; and it is difficult to see how the change from this system to national representation is ever to occur. The British Government is often accused of dividing men in order to govern them. But if it unnecessarily divides them at the very moment when it professes to start them on the road to governing themselves, it will find it difficult to meet the charge of being hypocritical or short-sighted.

A minority which is given special representation owing to its weak and backward state, is positively encouraged to settle down into a feeling of satisfied security;

We regard any system of communal electorates, therefore, as a very serious hindrance to the development of the self-governing principle ... At the same time we must face the hard facts. The Muhammadans [Muslims] were given special representation with separate electorates in 1909 [Indian Councils Act] ... Much as we regret the necessity, we are convinced that so far as the Muhammadans at all events are concerned the present system must be maintained until conditions alter, even at the price of slower progress towards the realisation of a common citizenship.

KEY TERM

Franchise The conditions making people eligible to vote.

? Study Source H. How does the argument shift across this sequence of paragraphs? How might different Indian nationalist groups feel about the final position?

KEY TERMS

Dyarchy Obscure term from classical Greek meaning two-part power.

Excise A tax on goods made inside the country.

Federal Government with considerable regional powers.

Dyarchy

The new division of responsibilities at two levels within the administration of India was termed **dyarchy**. In the first place, responsibility for a number of matters was transferred from the central Indian government to provincial administrations. The provinces became responsible for collecting land tax, **excise** duty and revenue from stamps. The provinces were made responsible for their irrigation works. The central government retained responsibility for income tax, customs duties, salt tax, postal communications and railways, as well as defence and foreign affairs. This division was regarded as a pragmatic delegation rather than a concession of potential **federal** organisation.

At the level of provincial administration, there was perhaps an even more significant division. Matters were deemed to be either 'reserved' or 'transferred'. Reserved matters – characterised as law, order and revenue – would remain the responsibility of the governor's executive council. Transferred matters – characterised as developmental and nation-building – would become the responsibility of the elected legislative council to which provincial ministers would be accountable. For the first time, Indian politicians would hold ministerial power subject to oversight by predominantly Indian councils (see Figure 2.1).

Central (national) government	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defence and foreign affairs • Income tax, salt tax, customs duties • Postal communications • Railways 	
Provincial government	
Reserved matters Provincial governor Executive council (members appointed)	Transferred matters Provincial ministers Legislative council (members elected)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land revenue • Law and justice • Police • Irrigation • Labour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local self-government (district councils) • Education • Health • Works • Agriculture and co-operatives

Figure 2.1 Dyarchic government.

Reactions

With hindsight, 1919 saw the temporary end of anarchic terrorist attacks and the end of military repression. However, it also marked the end of hope for moderate, gradual constitutional change.

Indian nationalist reaction to the 1919 Act was lukewarm. The provisions of the Act were complex and confusing. In fact, an inquiry would be launched in 1924–5 to review the breakdown of the political system created. The Act did not seem worth the prolonged wait during which expectations had built up. There was no point in not taking up the opportunities offered by the Act but there was a readiness to demand much more. The nationalist movement was about to be transformed from a small political elite pressing for concessions to a genuinely mass protest movement with demands for complete independence.

