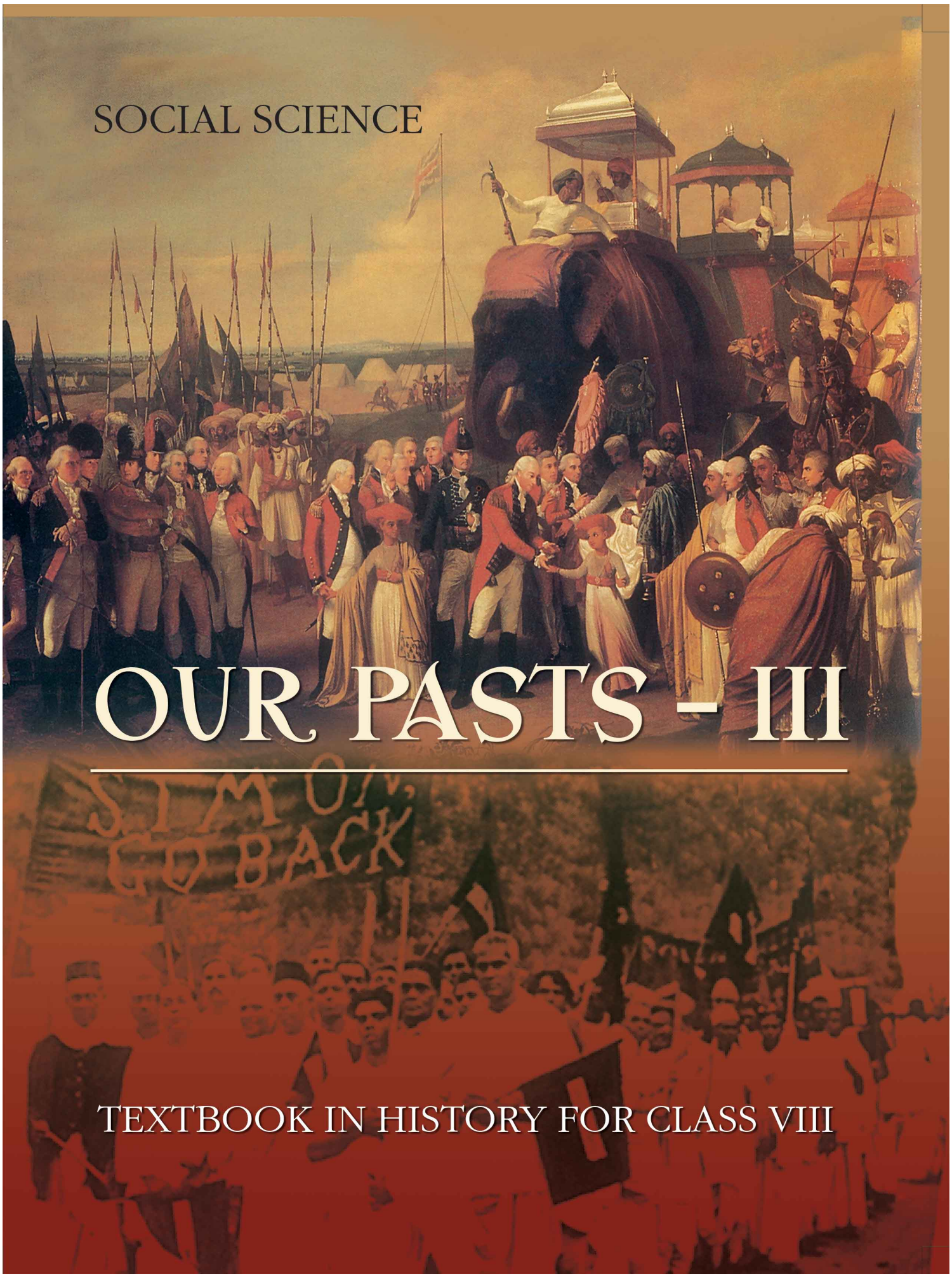
SOCIAL SCIENCE



OUR PASTS – III

TEXTBOOK IN HISTORY FOR CLASS VIII

1 How, When and Where

How Important are Dates?

There was a time when historians were fascinated with dates. There were heated debates about the dates on which rulers were crowned or battles were fought. In the common-sense notion, history was synonymous with dates. You may have heard people say, "I find history boring because it is all about memorising dates." Is such a conception true?

History is certainly about changes that occur over time. It is about finding out how things were in the past and how things have changed. As soon as we compare the past with the present we refer to time, we talk of "before" and "after".

Living in the world we do not always ask historical questions about what we see around us. We take things for granted, as if what we see has always been in the world we inhabit. But most of us have our moments of wonder, when we are curious, and we ask questions that actually are historical. Watching someone sip a cup of tea at a roadside tea stall you may wonder – when did people begin to drink tea or coffee? Looking out of the window of a train you may ask yourself – when were railways built and how did people travel long distances before the age of railways? Reading the newspaper in the morning you may be curious to know how people got to hear about things before newspapers began to be printed.

Activity

Look carefully at Fig.1 and write a paragraph explaining how this image projects an imperial perception.

***Fig. 1** – Brahmanes offering the Shastras to Britannia, frontispiece to the first map produced by James Rennel, 1782*

Rennel was asked by Robert Clive to produce maps of Hindustan. An enthusiastic supporter of British conquest of India, Clive saw possession of maps as essential to the process of domination. The picture here tries to suggest that Indians willingly gave over their ancient texts to Britannia – the symbol of British power – as if asking her to become the protector of Indian culture.

Fig. 2 : Advertisements help create taste

Old advertisements help us understand how markets for new products were created and new tastes were popularised. This 1922 advertisement for Lipton tea suggests that royalty all over the world drank and enjoyed this tea. In the background you see the outer wall of an Indian palace, while in the foreground, seated on horseback is the third son of Queen Victoria of Britain, Prince Arthur, who was given the title Duke of Connaught.

All such historical questions refer us back to notions of time. But time does not have to be always precisely dated in terms of a particular year or a month. Sometimes it is actually incorrect to fix precise dates to processes that happen over a period of time. People in India did not begin drinking tea one fine day; they developed a taste for it over time. There can be no one clear date for a process such as this. Similarly, we cannot fix one single date on which British rule was established, or the national movement started, or changes took place within the economy and society. All these things happened over a stretch of time. We can only refer to a span of time, an approximate period over which particular changes became visible.

Why, then, do we continue to associate history with a string of dates? This association has a reason. There was a time when history was an account of battles and big events. It was about rulers and their policies. Historians wrote about the year a king was crowned, the year he married, the year he had a child, the year he fought a particular war, the year he died, and the year the next ruler succeeded to the throne. For events such as these, specific dates can be determined, and in histories such as these, debates about dates continue to be important.

As you have seen in the history textbooks of the past two years, historians now write about a host of other issues, and other questions. They look at how people earned their livelihood, what they produced and ate, how cities developed and markets came up, how kingdoms were formed and new ideas spread, and how cultures and society changed.

Which dates?

By what criteria do we choose a set of dates as important? The dates we select, the dates around which we compose our story of the past, are not important on their own. They become vital because we focus on a particular set of events as important. If our focus of study changes, if we begin to look at new issues, a new set of dates will appear significant.

Consider an example. In the histories written by British historians in India, the rule of each Governor-General was important. These histories began with the rule of the first Governor-General, Warren Hastings, and ended with the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten. In separate chapters we read about the deeds of others –

Hastings, Wellesley, Bentinck, Dalhousie, Canning, Lawrence, Lytton, Ripon, Curzon, Harding, Irwin. It was a seemingly never-ending succession of Governor-Generals and Viceroys. All the dates in these history books were linked to these personalities – to their activities, policies, achievements. It was as if there was nothing outside their lives that was important for us to know. The chronology of their lives marked the different chapters of the history of British India.

Can we not write about the history of this period in a different way? How do we focus on the activities of different groups and classes in Indian society within the format of this history of Governor-Generals?

When we write history, or a story, we divide it into chapters. Why do we do this? It is to give each chapter some coherence. It is to tell a story in a way that makes some sense and can be followed. In the process we focus only on those events that help us to give shape to the story we are telling. In the histories that revolve around the life of British Governor-Generals, the activities of Indians simply do not fit, they have no space. What, then, do we do? Clearly, we need another format for our history. This would mean that the old dates will no longer have the significance they earlier had. A new set of dates will become more important for us to know.

Fig. 3 – *Warren Hastings became the first Governor-General of India in 1773.*

Male history books narrated the deeds of Governor-Generals. biographies glorified them as persons, and paintings projected them as powerful figures.

How do we periodise?

In 1817, James Mill, a Scottish economist and political philosopher, published a massive three-volume work, *A History of British India*. In this he divided Indian history into three periods – Hindu, Muslim and British. This periodisation came to be widely accepted. Can you think of any problem with this way of looking at Indian history?

Why do we try and divide history into different periods? We do so in an attempt to capture the characteristics of a time, its central features as they appear to us. So the terms through which we periodise – that is, demarcate the difference between periods – become important. They reflect our ideas about the past. They show how we see the significance of the change from one period to the next.

Mill thought that all Asian societies were at a lower level of civilisation than Europe. According to his telling of history, before the British came to India, Hindu and Muslim despots ruled the country. Religious intolerance, caste taboos and superstitious practices dominated

Activity

Interview your mother or another member of your family to find out about their life. Now divide their life into different periods and list out the significant events in each period. Explain the basis of your periodisation.

social life. British rule, Mill felt, could civilise India. To do this it was necessary to introduce European manners, arts, institutions and laws in India. Mill, in fact, suggested that the British should conquer all the territories in India to ensure the enlightenment and happiness of the Indian people. For India was not capable of progress without British help.

In this idea of history, British rule represented all the forces of progress and civilisation. The period before British rule was one of darkness. Can such a conception be accepted today?

In any case, can we refer to any period of history as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim'? Did not a variety of faiths exist simultaneously in these periods? Why should we characterise an age only through the religion of the rulers of the time? To do so is to suggest that the lives and practices of the others do not really matter. We should also remember that even rulers in ancient India did not all share the same faith.

Moving away from British classification, historians have usually divided Indian history into 'ancient', 'medieval' and 'modern'. This division too has its problems. It is a periodisation that is borrowed from the West where the modern period was associated with the growth of all the forces of modernity – science, reason, democracy, liberty and equality. Medieval was a term used to describe a society where these features of modern society did not exist. Can we uncritically accept this characterisation of the modern period to describe the period of our study? As you will see in this book, under British rule people did not have equality, freedom or liberty. Nor was the period one of economic growth and progress.

Many historians therefore refer to this period as 'colonial'.

What is colonial?

In this book you will read about the way the British came to conquer the country and establish their rule, subjugating local nawabs and rajas. You will see how they established control over the economy and society, collected revenue to meet all their expenses, bought the goods they wanted at low prices, produced crops they needed for export, and you will understand the changes that came about as a consequence. You will also come to know about the changes British rule brought about in values and tastes, customs and practices. When the subjugation of one country by another leads to these kinds of political, economic, social and cultural changes, we refer to the process as colonisation.

You will, however, find that all classes and groups did not experience these changes in the same way. That is why the book is called *Our Pasts* in the plural.

How do We Know?

What sources do historians use in writing about the last 250 years of Indian history?

Administration produces records

One important source is the official records of the British administration. The British believed that the act of writing was important. Every instruction, plan, policy decision, agreement, investigation had to be clearly written up. Once this was done, things could be properly studied and debated. This conviction produced an administrative culture of memos, notings and reports.

The British also felt that all important documents and letters needed to be carefully preserved. So they set up record rooms attached to all administrative institutions. The village *tahsildar*'s office, the collectorate, the commissioner's office, the provincial secretariats, the lawcourts – all had their record rooms. Specialised institutions like archives and museums were also established to preserve important records.

Letters and memos that moved from one branch of the administration to another in the early years of the nineteenth century can still be read in the archives. You can also study the notes and reports that district officials prepared, or the instructions and directives that were sent by officials at the top to provincial administrators.

In the early years of the nineteenth century these documents were carefully copied out and beautifully written by calligraphists – that is, by those who specialised in the art of beautiful writing. By the middle of the nineteenth century, with the spread of printing, multiple copies of these records were printed as proceedings of each government department.

***Fig. 4** – The National Archives of India came up in the 1920s*

When New Delhi was built, the National Museum and the National Archives were both located close to the Viceregal Palace. This location reflects the importance these institutions had in British imagination.

Source 1

Reports to the Home Department

In 1946 the colonial government in India was trying to put down a mutiny that broke out on the ships of the Royal Indian Navy. Here is a sample of the kind of reports the Home Department got from the different dockyards:

Bombay: Armaguments have been made for the Army to take over ships and establishment. Royal Navy ships are remaining outside the harbour.

Karachi: 301 mutineers are under arrest and a few more strongly suspected are to be arrested ... All establishments ... are under military guard.

Vizagapatnam: The position is completely under control and no violence has occurred. Military guards have been placed on ships and establishments. No further trouble is expected except that a few men may refuse to work.

Director of Intelligence, HQ, India Command, Situation Report No. 7, File No. 5/2/46 Home (Political), Government of India

Fig. 5 - A *custard-apple plant, 1770s*
Botanical gardens encouraged botany museums established by the British collected plant specimens and information about their uses. Local artists were asked to draw pictures of these specimens. Historians are now looking at the way such information was gathered and what this information reveals about the nature of colonialism.

Surveys become important

The practice of surveying also became common under the colonial administration. The British believed that a country had to be properly known before it could be effectively administered.

> By the early nineteenth century detailed surveys were being carried out to map the entire country. In the villages, revenue surveys were conducted. The effort was to know the topography, the soil quality, the flora, the fauna, the local histories, and the cropping pattern – all the facts seen as necessary to know about to administer the region.

From the end of the nineteenth century, Census operations were held every ten years. These prepared detailed records of the number of people in all the provinces of India, noting information on castes, religions and occupation. There were many other surveys – botanical surveys, zoological surveys, archaeological surveys, anthropological surveys, forest surveys.

What official records do not tell

From this vast corpus of records we can get to know a lot, but we must remember that these are official records. They tell us what the officials thought, what

Fig. 6 - *Mapping and survey operations in progress in Bengal, a drawing by James Prinsep, 1832*
Note how all the instruments that were used in surveys are placed in the foreground to emphasise the scientific nature of the project.

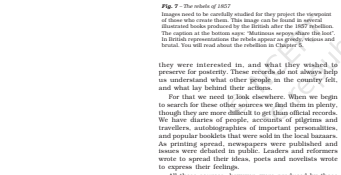


***Fig. 7** – The rebels of 1857*
Images need to be carefully studied for they project the viewpoint of those who create them. This image can be found in several illustrated books produced by the British after the 1857 rebellion. The caption at the bottom says: "Mutineers sepoys share the loot". In British representations the rebels appear as greedy, vicious and brutal. You will read about the rebellion in Chapter 8.

they were interested in, and what they wished to preserve for posterity. These records do not always help us understand what other people in the country felt, and what lay behind their actions.

For that we need to look elsewhere. When we begin to search for these other sources we find them in plenty, though they are more difficult to get than official records. We have diaries of people, accounts of pilgrims and travellers, autobiographies of important personalities, and popular booklets that were sold in the local bazaars. As printing spread, newspapers were published and issues were debated in public. Leaders and reformers wrote to spread their ideas, poets and novelists wrote to express their feelings.

All these sources, however, were produced by those who were literate. From these we will not be able to understand how history was experienced and lived by the tribals and the peasants, the workers in the mines or the poor on the streets. Getting to know their lives is a more difficult task.

Yet this can be done, if we make a little bit of effort. When you read this book you will see how this can be done.

Source 2

"Not fit for human consumption"

Newspapers provide accounts of the movements in different parts of the country. Here is a report of a police strike in 1946.

More than 2000 policemen in Delhi refused to take their food on Thursday morning as a protest against their low salaries and the bad quality of food supplied to them from the Police Lines kitchen.

As the news spread to the other police stations, the men there also refused to take food ... One of the strikers said: "The food supplied to us from the Police Lines kitchen is not fit for human consumption. Even cattle would not eat the *chapattis* and *dal* which we have to eat."

Hindustan Times, 22 March, 1946

Activity

Look at Sources 1 and 2. Do you find any differences in the nature of reporting? Explain what you observe.

Let's imagine

Imagine that you are a historian wanting to find out about how agriculture changed in a remote tribal area after independence. List the different ways in which you would find information on this.

Let's recall

1. State whether true or false:
   (a) James Mill divided Indian history into three periods – Hindu, Muslim, Christian.
   (b) Official documents help us understand what the people of the country think.
   (c) The British thought surveys were important for effective administration.

Let's discuss

2. What is the problem with the periodisation of Indian history that James Mill offers?
3. Why did the British preserve official documents?
4. How will the information historians get from old newspapers be different from that found in police reports?

Let's do

5. Can you think of examples of surveys in your world today? Think about how toy companies get information about what young people enjoy playing with or how the government finds out about the number of young people in school. What can a historian derive from such surveys?

2 From Trade to Territory
The Company Establishes Power

Aurangzeb was the last of the powerful Mughal rulers. He established control over a very large part of the territory that is now known as India. After his death in 1707, many Mughal governors (*subadars*) and big zamindars began asserting their authority and establishing regional kingdoms. As powerful regional kingdoms emerged in various parts of India, Delhi could no longer function as an effective centre.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, a new power was emerging on the political horizon – the British. Did you know that the British originally came as a small trading company and were reluctant to acquire territories? How then did they come to be masters of a vast empire? In this chapter you will see how this came about.

***Fig. 1** – Bahadur Shah Zafar and his sons being arrested by Captain Hodson*

After Aurangzeb there was no powerful Mughal ruler, but Mughal emperors continued to be symbolically important. In fact, when a massive rebellion against British rule broke out in 1857, Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Mughal emperor at the time, was seen as the natural leader. Once the revolt was put down by the company, Bahadur Shah Zafar was forced to leave the kingdom, and his sons were shot in cold blood.

***Fig. 2** – Routes to India in the eighteenth century*

East India Company Comes East

In 1600, the East India Company acquired a charter from the ruler of England. Queen Elizabeth I, granting it the sole right to trade with the East. This meant that no other trading group in England could compete with the East India Company. With this charter the Company could venture across the oceans, looking for new lands from which it could buy goods at a cheap price, and carry them back to Europe to sell at higher prices. The Company did not have to fear competition from other English trading companies, **Mercantile** trading companies in those days made profit primarily by excluding competition, so that they could buy cheap and sell dear.

Mercantile – A business enterprise that makes profit primarily through trade, buying goods cheap and selling them at higher prices

The royal charter, however, could not prevent other European powers from entering the Eastern markets. By the time the first English ships sailed down the west coast of Africa, round the Cape of Good Hope, and crossed the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese had already established their presence in the western coast of India, and had their base in Goa. In fact, it was Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer, who had discovered this sea route to India in 1498. By the early seventeenth century, the Dutch too were exploring the possibilities of trade in the Indian Ocean. Soon the French traders arrived on the scene.

The problem was that all the companies were interested in buying the same things. The fine qualities of cotton and silk produced in India had a big market in Europe. Pepper, cloves, cardamom and cinnamon too were in great demand. Competition amongst the European companies inevitably pushed up the prices at which these goods could be purchased, and this reduced the profits that could be earned. The only way the trading companies could flourish was by eliminating rival competitors. The urge to secure markets therefore led to fierce battles between the trading companies. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they regularly sank each other's ships, blockaded routes, and prevented rival ships from moving with supplies of

goods. Trade was carried on with arms and trading posts were protected through fortification.

This effort to fortify settlements and carry on profitable trade also led to intense conflict with local rulers. The company therefore found it difficult to separate trade from politics. Let us see how this happened.

East India Company begins trade in Bengal

The first English factory was set up on the banks of the river Hugli in 1651. This was the base from which the Company's traders, known at that time as "factors", operated. The factory had a warehouse where goods for export were stored, and it had offices where Company officials sat. As trade expanded, the Company persuaded merchants and traders to come and settle near the factory. By 1696 it began building a fort around the settlement. Two years later it bribed Mughal officials into giving the Company zamindari rights over three villages. One of these was Kalikata, which later grew into the city of Calcutta or Kolkata as it is known today. It also persuaded the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to issue a ***farman*** granting the Company the right to trade duty free.

The Company tried continuously to press for more concessions and manipulate existing privileges. Aurangzeb's *farman*, for instance, had granted only the Company the right to trade duty free. But officials of the Company, who were carrying on private trade on the side, were expected to pay duty. This they refused to pay, causing an enormous loss of revenue for Bengal. How could the Nawab of Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan, not protest?

Farman – A royal edict, a royal order

Fig. 3 *– Local boats bring goods from ships in Madras, painted by William Simpson, 1867*

Fig. 4 – Robert Clive

How trade led to battles

Through the early eighteenth century the conflict between the Company and the nawabs of Bengal intensified. After the death of Aurangzeb, the Bengal nawabs asserted their power and autonomy, as other regional powers were doing at that time. Murshad Quli Khan was followed by Alivardi Khan and then Sirajuddaulah as the Nawab of Bengal. Each one of them was a strong ruler. They refused to grant the Company concessions, demanded large tributes for the Company's right to trade, denied it any right to mint coins, and stopped it from extending its fortifications. Accusing the Company of deceit, they claimed that the Company was depriving the Bengal government of huge amounts of revenue and undermining the authority of the nawab. It was refusing to pay taxes, writing disrespectful letters, and trying to humiliate the nawab and his officials.

The Company on its part declared that the unjust demands of the local officials were ruining the trade of the Company, and trade could flourish only if the duties were removed. It was also convinced that to expand trade it had to enlarge its settlements, buy up villages, and rebuild its forts.

The conflicts led to confrontations and finally culminated in the famous Battle of Plassey.

Puppet – Literally, a toy that you can move with strings. The term is used disapprovingly to refer to a person who is controlled by someone else.

The Battle of Plassey

When Alivardi Khan died in 1756, Sirajuddaulah became the nawab of Bengal. The Company was worried about his power and keen on a **puppet** ruler who would willingly give trade concessions and other privileges. So it tried, though without success, to help one of Sirajuddaulah's rivals become the nawab. An infuriated Sirajuddaulah asked the Company to stop meddling in the political affairs of his dominion, stop fortification, and pay the revenues. After negotiations failed, the Nawab marched with 30,000 soldiers to the English factory at Kassimbazar, captured the Company officials, locked the warehouse, disarmed all Englishmen, and blockaded English ships. Then he marched to Calcutta to establish control over the Company's fort there.

On hearing the news of the fall of Calcutta, Company officials in Madras sent forces under the command of Robert Clive, reinforced by naval fleets. Prolonged negotiations with the Nawab followed. Finally, in 1757, Robert Clive led the Company's army against Sirajuddaulah at Plassey. One of the main reasons for

Did you know?

Did you know how Plassey got its name? Plassey is an anglicised pronunciation of Palashi and the place derived its name from the *palash* tree known for its beautiful red flowers that yield *gulal*, the powder used in the festival of Holi.

***Fig. 5** – The General Court Room, East India House, Leadenhall Street*
The Court of Proprietors of the East India Company had their meetings in the East India House on Leadenhall Street in London. This is a picture of one of their meetings in progress.

the defeat of the Nawab was that the forces led by Mir Jafar, one of Sirajuddaulah's commanders, never fought the battle. Clive had managed to secure his support by promising to make him nawab after crushing Sirajuddaulah.

The Battle of Plassey became famous because it was the first major victory the Company won in India.

Source 1

The promise of riches

The territorial ambitions of the mercantile East India Company were viewed with distrust and doubt in England. After the Battle of Plassey, Robert Clive wrote to William Pitt, one of the Principal Secretaries of State to the English monarch, on 7 January 1759 from Calcutta:

> But so large a sovereignty may possibly be an object too extensive for a mercantile Company ... I flatter myself ... that there will be little or no difficulty in obtaining the absolute possession of these rich kingdoms ... Now I leave you to judge, whether an income yearly of two millions sterling with the possession of three provinces ... be an object deserving the public attention ...

Fig. 6 – Sirajuddaulah

Source 2

The Nawab complains

In 1733 the Nawab of Bengal said this about the English traders:

> When they first came into the country they petitioned the then government in a humble manner for liberty to purchase a spot of ground to build a factory house upon, which was no sooner granted but they built a strong fort, surrounded it with a ditch which has communication with the river and mounted a great number of guns upon the walls. They have enticed several merchants and others to go and take protection under them and they collect a revenue which amounts to Rs.100,000 ... they rob and plunder and carry great number of the king's subjects of both sexes into slavery into their own country ...

After the defeat at Plassey, Sirajuddaulah was assassinated and Mir Jafar made the nawab. The Company was still unwilling to take over the responsibility of administration. Its prime objective was the expansion of trade. If this could be done without conquest, through the help of local rulers who were willing to grant privileges, then territories need not be taken over directly.

Soon the Company discovered that this was rather difficult. For even the puppet nawabs were not always as helpful as the Company wanted them to be. After all, they had to maintain a basic appearance of dignity and sovereignty if they wanted respect from their subjects.

What could the Company do? When Mir Jafar protested, the Company deposed him and installed Mir Qasim in his place. When Mir Qasim complained, he in turn was defeated in a battle fought at Buxar (1764), driven out of Bengal, and Mir Jafar was reinstalled. The Nawab had to pay Rs 500,000 every month but the Company wanted more money to finance its wars, and meet the demands of trade and its other expenses. It wanted more territories and more revenue. By the time Mir Jafar died in 1765 the mood of the Company had changed. Having failed to work with puppet nawabs, Clive declared: "We must indeed become nawabs ourselves."

Finally, in 1765 the Mughal emperor appointed the Company as the Diwan of the provinces of Bengal. The Diwani allowed the Company to use the vast revenue resources of Bengal. This solved a major problem that the Company had earlier faced. From the early eighteenth century its trade with India had expanded. But it had to buy most of the goods in India with gold and silver imported from Britain. This was because at this time Britain had no goods to sell in India. The outflow of gold from Britain slowed after the Battle of Plassey, and entirely stopped after the assumption of Diwani. Now revenues from India could finance Company expenses. These revenues could be used to purchase cotton and silk textiles in India, maintain Company troops, and meet the cost of building the Company fort and offices at Calcutta.

Company officials become "nabobs"

What did it mean to be nawabs? It meant of course that the Company acquired more power and authority. But it also meant something else. Each company servant began to have visions of living like nawabs.

After the Battle of Plassey the actual nawabs of Bengal were forced to give land and vast sums of money as personal gifts to Company officials. Robert Clive himself amassed a fortune in India. He had come to Madras (now Chennai) from England in 1743 at the age of 18. When in 1767 he left India his Indian fortune was worth £401,102. Interestingly, when he was appointed Governor of Bengal in 1764, he was asked to remove corruption in Company administration but he was himself cross-examined in 1772 by the British Parliament which was suspicious of his vast wealth. Although he was acquitted, he committed suicide in 1774.

However, not all Company officials succeeded in making money like Clive. Many died an early death in India due to disease and war and it would not be right to regard all of them as corrupt and dishonest. Many of them came from humble backgrounds and their uppermost desire was to earn enough in India, return to Britain and lead a comfortable life. Those who managed to return with wealth led flashy lives and flaunted their riches. They were called "nabobs" – an anglicised version of the Indian word nawab. They were often seen as upstarts and social climbers in British society and were ridiculed or made fun of in plays and cartoons.

Source 3

How did Clive see himself?

At his hearing in front of a Committee in Parliament, Clive declared that he had shown admirable restraint after the Battle of Plassey. This is what he said:

> Consider the situation in which the victory at Plassey had placed me! A great prince was dependent on my pleasure; an opulent city lay at my mercy; its richest bankers bid against each other for my smiles; I walked through vaults which were thrown open to me alone, piled on either hand with gold and jewels! Mr Chairman, at this moment I stand astonished at my moderation.

Company Rule Expands

If we analyse the process of annexation of Indian states by the East India Company from 1757 to 1857, certain key aspects emerge. The Company rarely launched a direct military attack on an unknown territory. Instead it used a variety of political, economic and diplomatic methods to extend its influence before annexing an Indian kingdom.

After the Battle of Buxar (1764), the Company appointed Residents in Indian states. They were political or commercial agents and their job was to serve and further the interests of the Company. Through the Residents, the Company officials began interfering in the internal affairs of Indian states. They tried to decide who was to be the successor to the throne, and who was to be appointed in administrative posts. Sometimes the Company forced the states into a "subsidiary alliance". According to the terms of this alliance, Indian rulers were not allowed to have their independent armed forces. They were to be protected by the Company, but

Activity

Imagine that you are a young Company official who has been in India for a few months. Write a letter home to your mother telling her about your luxurious life and contrasting it with your earlier life in Britain.

Fig. 7 – *Nawab Shujauddaulah of Awadh, with his sons and the British Resident, painted by Tilly Kettle (ed. 1772)*

The treaties that followed the Battle of Buxar forced Nawab Shujauddaulah to give up much of his authority. Here, however, he poses in regal splendour, towering over the Resident.

Injunction – Instruction

Subservience – Submissiveness

had to pay for the "subsidiary forces" that the Company was supposed to maintain for the purpose of this protection. If the Indian rulers failed to make the payment, then part of their territory was taken away as penalty. For example, when Richard Wellesley was Governor-General (1798-1805), the Nawab of Awadh was forced to give over half of his territory to the Company in 1801, as he failed to pay for the "subsidiary forces". Hyderabad was also forced to cede territories on similar grounds.

Source 4

What power did the Resident have?

This is what James Mill, the famous economist and political philosopher from Scotland, wrote about the residents appointed by the Company.

> We place a resident, who really is king of the country, whatever injunctions of non-interference he may act under. As long as the prince acts in perfect subservience, and does what is agreeable to the resident, that is, to the British Government, things go on quietly; they are managed without the resident appearing much in the administration of affairs ... but, when anything of a different nature happens, the moment the prince takes a course which the British Government think wrong, then comes chiding and disturbance.
>
> *James Mill (1832)*

Fig. 8 – Tipu Sultan

Tipu Sultan – The "Tiger of Mysore"

The Company resorted to direct military confrontation when it saw a threat to its political or economic interests. This can be illustrated with the case of the southern Indian state of Mysore.

Mysore had grown in strength under the leadership of powerful rulers like Haidar Ali (ruled from 1761 to 1782) and his famous son Tipu Sultan (ruled from 1782 to 1799). Mysore controlled the profitable trade of the Malabar coast where the Company purchased pepper and cardamom. In 1785 Tipu Sultan stopped the export of sandalwood, pepper and cardamom through the ports of his kingdom, and disallowed local merchants from trading with the Company. He also established a close

***Fig. 9** – Cornwallis receiving the sons of Tipu Sultan as hostages, painted by Daniel Orme, 1793*
The Company forces were defeated by Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan in several battles. But in 1792, attacked by the combined forces of the Marathas, the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Company, Tipu was forced to sign a treaty with the victors by which two of his sons were taken away as hostages. British painters always liked painting scenes that showed the triumph of British power.

relationship with the French in India, and modernised his army with their help.

The British were furious. They saw Haidar and Tipu as ambitious, arrogant and dangerous – rulers who had to be controlled and crushed. Four wars were fought with Mysore (1767–69, 1780–84, 1790–92 and 1799). Only in the last – the Battle of Seringapatam – did the Company ultimately win a victory. Tipu Sultan was killed defending his capital Seringapatam. Mysore was placed under the former ruling dynasty of the Wodeyars and a subsidiary alliance was imposed on the state.

***Fig. 10** – Tipu's toy tiger*
This is the picture of a big mechanical toy that Tipu possessed. You can see a tiger mauling a European soldier. When its handle is turned, the tiger roars and the European soldier shrieked. This toy tiger is now kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The British took it away when Tipu Sultan died defending his capital Seringapatam on 4 May 1799.

The legend of Tipu

Kings are often surrounded by legend and their powers glorified through folklore. Here is a legend about Tipu Sultan who became the ruler of Mysore in 1782. It is said that once he went hunting in the forest with a French friend. There he came face to face with a tiger. His gun did not work and his dagger fell to the ground. He battled with the tiger unarmed until he managed to reach down and pick up the dagger. Finally he was able to kill the tiger in the battle. After this he came to be known as the 'Tiger of Mysore'. He had the image of the tiger on his flag.

Activity

Imagine that you have come across two old newspapers reporting on the Battle of Seringapatam and the death of Tipu Sultan. One is a British paper and the other is from Mysore. Write the headline for each of the two newspapers.

Confederacy – Alliance

Fig. 11 *– Lord Hastings*

Fig. 12 *– A Statue of the Queen of Kittur (Karnataka)*

War with the Marathas

From the late eighteenth century the Company also sought to curb and eventually destroy Maratha power. With their defeat in the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, the Marathas' dream of ruling from Delhi was shattered. They were divided into many states under different chiefs (*sardars*) belonging to dynasties such as Sindhia, Holkar, Gaikwad and Bhonsle. These chiefs were held together in a **confederacy** under a Peshwa (Principal Minister) who became its effective military and administrative head based in Pune. Mahadji Sindhia and Nana Phadnis were two famous Maratha soldiers and statesmen of the late eighteenth century.

The Marathas were subdued in a series of wars. In the first war that ended in 1782 with the Treaty of Salbai, there was no clear victor. The Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803-05) was fought on different fronts, resulting in the British gaining Orissa and the territories north of the Yamuna river including Agra and Delhi. Finally, the Third Anglo-Maratha War of 1817-19 crushed Maratha power. The Peshwa was removed and sent away to Bithur near Kanpur with a pension. The Company now had complete control over the territories south of the Vindhyas.

The claim to paramountcy

It is clear from the above that from the early nineteenth century the Company pursued an aggressive policy of territorial expansion. Under Lord Hastings (Governor-General from 1813 to 1823) a new policy of "paramountcy" was initiated. Now the Company claimed that its authority was paramount or supreme, hence its power was greater than that of Indian states. In order to protect its interests it was justified in annexing or threatening to annex any Indian kingdom. This view continued to guide later British policies as well.

This process, however, did not go unchallenged. For example, when the British tried to annex the small state of Kittoor (in Karnataka today), Rani Channamma took to arms and led an anti-British resistance movement. She was arrested in 1824 and died in prison in 1829. But Rayanna, a poor *chenkidar* of Sangoli in Kittoor, carried on the resistance. With popular support he destroyed many British camps and records. He was caught and hanged by the British in 1830. You will read more about several cases of resistance later in the book.

In the late 1830s the East India Company became worried about Russia. It imagined that Russia might expand across Asia and enter India from the north-west. Driven by this fear, the British now wanted to secure their control over the north-west. They fought a prolonged war with Afghanistan between 1838 and 1842 and established indirect Company rule there. Sind was taken over in 1843. Next in line was Punjab. But the presence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh held back the Company. After his death in 1839, two prolonged wars were fought with the Sikh kingdom. Ultimately, in 1849, Punjab was annexed.

The Doctrine of Lapse

The final wave of annexations occurred under Lord Dalhousie who was the Governor-General from 1848 to 1856. He devised a policy that came to be known as the Doctrine of Lapse. The doctrine declared that if an Indian ruler died without a male heir his kingdom would "lapse", that is, become part of Company territory. One kingdom after another was annexed simply by applying this doctrine: Satara (1848), Sambalpur (1850), Udaipur (1852), Nagpur (1853) and Jhansi (1854).

Finally, in 1856, the Company also took over Awadh. This time the British had an added argument – they said they were "obliged by duty" to take over Awadh in order to free the people from the "misgovernment" of the Nawab! Enraged by the humiliating way in which the Nawab was deposed, the people of Awadh joined the great revolt that broke out in 1857.

Activity

Imagine that you are a nawab's nephew and have been brought up thinking that you will one day be king. Now you find that this will not be allowed by the British because of the new Doctrine of Lapse. What will be your feelings? What will you plan to do so that you can inherit the crown?

***Fig. 13** – Maharaja Ranjit Singh holding court*

***Fig. 14** – A portrait of Veer Surendra Sai*

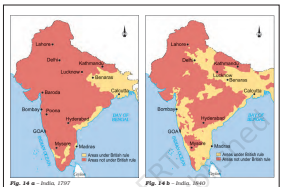


Fig. 14 a – *India, 1797*

Fig. 14 b – *India, 1840*

Fig. 14c – *India, 1857*

Fig. 14 a, b, c – *Expansion of British territorial power in India*

Look at these maps along with a present-day political map of India. In each of these maps, try and identify the different parts of India that were not under British rule.

Setting up a New Administration

Warren Hastings (Governor-General from 1773 to 1785) was one of the many important figures who played a significant role in the expansion of Company power. By his time the Company had acquired power not only in Bengal, but also in Bombay and Madras. British territories were broadly divided into administrative units called Presidencies. There were three Presidencies: Bengal, Madras and Bombay. Each was ruled by a Governor. The supreme head of the administration was the Governor-General. Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General, introduced several administrative reforms, notably in the sphere of justice.

From 1772 a new system of justice was established. Each district was to have two courts – a criminal court (*faujdari adalat*) and a civil court (*diwani adalat*). Maulvis and Hindu pandits interpreted Indian laws for the European district collectors who presided over civil courts. The criminal courts were still under a ***qazi*** and a ***mufti*** but under the supervision of the collectors.

Qazi – A judge

Mufti – A jurist of the Muslim community responsible for expounding the law that the *qazi* would administer

Impeachment – A trial by the House of Lords in England for charges of misconduct brought against a person in the House of Commons

Fig. 15 – *The trial of Warren Hastings, painted by R.G. Talbot, 1789*
When Warren Hastings went back to England in 1785, Edmund Burke accused him of being personally responsible for the misgovernment of Bengal. This led to an **impeachment** proceeding in the British Parliament that lasted seven years.

Source 5

"I impeach the common enemy and oppressor of all."

Here is a passage from Edmund Burke's eloquent opening speech during the impeachment of Warren Hastings:

I impeach him in the name of the people of India, whose rights he has trodden under his foot and whose country he has turned into a desert. Lastly in the name of human nature itself, in the name of both the sexes, in the name of every age, in the name of every rank, I impeach the common enemy and oppressor of all.

Dharmashastras – Sanskrit texts prescribing social rules and codes of behaviour, composed from c. 500 BCE onwards

Sawar – Men on horses

Musket – A heavy gun used by infantry soldiers

Matchlock – An early type of gun in which the powder was ignited by a match

A major problem was that the Brahman pandits gave different interpretations of local laws based on different schools of the ***dharmashastra***. To bring about uniformity, in 1775 eleven pandits were asked to compile a digest of Hindu laws. N.B. Halhed translated this digest into English. By 1778 a code of Muslim laws was also compiled for the benefit of European judges. Under the Regulating Act of 1773, a new Supreme Court was established, while a court of appeal – the Sadar Nizamat Adalat – was also set up at Calcutta.

The principal figure in an Indian district was the Collector. As the title suggests, his main job was to collect revenue and taxes and maintain law and order in his district with the help of judges, police officers and daroga. His office – the Collectorate – became the new centre of power and patronage that steadily replaced previous holders of authority.

The Company army

Colonial rule in India brought in some new ideas of administration and reform but its power rested on its military strength. The Mughal army was mainly composed of cavalry (**sawars**: trained soldiers on horseback) and infantry, that is, *paidal* (foot) soldiers. They were given training in archery (*teer-andazi*) and the use of the sword. The cavalry dominated the army and the Mughal state did not feel the need to have a large professionally trained infantry. The rural areas had a large number of armed peasants and the local zamindars often supplied the Mughals with *paidal* soldiers.

A change occurred in the eighteenth century when Mughal successor states like Awadh and Benaras started recruiting peasants into their armies and training them as professional soldiers. The East India Company adopted the same method when it began recruitment for its own army, which came to be known as the sepoy army (from the Indian word *sipahi*, meaning soldier).

As warfare technology changed from the 1820s, the cavalry requirements of the Company's army declined. This is because the British empire was fighting in Burma, Afghanistan and Egypt where soldiers were armed with **muskets** and **matchlocks**. The soldiers of the Company's army had to keep pace with changing military requirements and its infantry regiments now became more important.

In the early nineteenth century the British began to develop a uniform military culture. Soldiers were

***Fig. 16** – A sowar of Bengal in the service of the Company, painted by an unknown Indian artist, 1780*

After the battles with the Marathas and the Mysore rulers, the Company realised the importance of strengthening its cavalry force.

increasingly subjected to European-style training, drill and discipline that regulated their life far more than before. Often this created problems since caste and community feelings were ignored in building a force of professional soldiers. Could individuals so easily give up their caste and religious feelings? Could they see themselves only as soldiers and not as members of communities?

What did the sepoys feel? How did they react to the changes in their lives and their identity – that is, their sense of who they were? The Revolt of 1857 gives us a glimpse into the world of the sepoys. You will read about this revolt in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

Thus the East India Company was transformed from a trading company to a territorial colonial power. The arrival of new steam technology in the early nineteenth century also aided this process. Till then it would take anywhere between six and eight months to travel to India by sea. Steamships reduced the journey time to three weeks enabling more Britishers and their families to come to a far-off country like India.

By 1857 the Company came to exercise direct rule over about 63 per cent of the territory and 78 per cent of the population of the Indian subcontinent. Combined with its indirect influence on the remaining territory and population of the country, the East India Company had virtually the whole of India under its control.

ELSEWHERE

Slave Trade in South Africa

The Dutch trading ships reached southern Africa in the seventeenth century. Soon a slave trade began. People were captured, chained, and sold in slave markets. When slavery ended in 1834 there were 36,774 privately owned slaves at the Cape – located at the southern most tip of Africa.

A visitor to the Cape in 1824 has left a moving account of what he saw at a slave auction:

> Having learned that there was to be sale of cattle, farm-stock, etc by auction, ... we halted our wagon for the purpose of procuring fresh oxen. Among the stock ... was a female slave and her three children. The farmers examined them, as if they had been so many head of cattle. They were sold separately, and to different purchasers. The born, the anxiety, the anguish of the mother, while she ... cast heart-rending look upon her children, and the simplicity and touching sorrow of the poor young ones while they clung to their distracted parent ... contrasted with the marked insensitivity and peculiar countenances of the spectators

Quoted in Nigel Worden et. al., *The Chains that Bind us: a History of Slavery at the Cape*, 1996.

Let's imagine

You are living in England in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. How would you have reacted to the stories of British conquests? Remember that you would have read about the immense fortunes that many of the officials were making.

Let's recall

1. Match the following:

Diwani	Tipu Sultan
"Tiger of Mysore"	right to collect land revenue
faujdari adalat	*Sepoy*
Rani Channamma	criminal court
sipahi	led an anti-British movement in Kitoor

2. Fill in the blanks:

(a) The British conquest of Bengal began with the Battle of _____.

(b) Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan were the rulers of _____.

(c) Dalhousie implemented the Doctrine of _____.

(d) Maratha kingdoms were located mainly in the _____ part of India.

3. State whether true or false:

(a) The Mughal empire became stronger in the eighteenth century.

(b) The English East India Company was the only European company that traded with India.

(c) Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the ruler of Punjab.

(d) The British did not introduce administrative changes in the territories they conquered.

Let's discuss

4. What attracted European trading companies to India?

5. What were the areas of conflict between the Bengal nawabs and the East India Company?

6. How did the assumption of Diwani benefit the East India Company?

7. Explain the system of "subsidiary alliance".

8. In what way was the administration of the Company different from that of Indian rulers?

9. Describe the changes that occurred in the composition of the Company's army.

Let's do

10. After the British conquest of Bengal, Calcutta grew from a small village to a big city. Find out about the culture, architecture and the life of Europeans and Indians of the city during the colonial period.

11. Collect pictures, stories, poems and information about any of the following – the Rani of Jhansi, Mahadji Sindhia, Haidar Ali, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lord Dalhousie or any other contemporary ruler of your region.

3 Ruling the Countryside

Fig. 1 – *Robert Clive accepting the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal ruler in 1765*

The Company Becomes the Diwan

On 12 August 1765, the Mughal emperor appointed the East India Company as the Diwan of Bengal. The actual event most probably took place in Robert Clive's tent, with a few Englishmen and Indians as witnesses. But in the painting above, the event is shown as a majestic occasion, taking place in a grand setting. The painter was commissioned by Clive to record the memorable events in Clive's life. The grant of Diwani clearly was one such event in British imagination.

As Diwan, the Company became the chief financial administrator of the territory under its control. Now it had to think of administering the land and organising its revenue resources. This had to be done in a way that could yield enough revenue to meet the growing expenses of the company. A trading company had also to ensure that it could buy the products it needed and sell what it wanted.

Over the years the Company also learnt that it had to move with some caution. Being an alien power, it needed to pacify those who in the past had ruled the countryside, and enjoyed authority and prestige. Those who had held local power had to be controlled but they could not be entirely eliminated.

How was this to be done? In this chapter we will see how the Company came to colonise the countryside, organise revenue resources, redefine the rights of people, and produce the crops it wanted.

Revenue for the Company

The Company had become the Diwan, but it still saw itself primarily as a trader. It wanted a large revenue income but was unwilling to set up any regular system of assessment and collection. The effort was to increase the revenue as much as it could and buy fine cotton and silk cloth as cheaply as possible. Within five years the value of goods bought by the Company in Bengal doubled. Before 1865, the Company had purchased goods in India by importing gold and silver from Britain. Now the revenue collected in Bengal could finance the purchase of goods for export.

Soon it was clear that the Bengal economy was facing a deep crisis. Artisans were deserting villages since they were being forced to sell their goods to the Company at low prices. Peasants were unable to pay the dues that were being demanded from them. Artisanal production was in decline, and agricultural cultivation showed signs of collapse. Then in 1770 a terrible famine killed ten million people in Bengal. About one-third of the population was wiped out.

***Fig. 2** – A weekly market in Murshidabad in Bengal*

Peasants and artisans from rural areas regularly came to these weekly markets (*haats*) to sell their goods and buy what they needed. These markets were badly affected during times of economic crisis.

Fig. 3 – Charles Cornwallis Cornwallis was the Governor-General of India when the Permanent Settlement was introduced.

Source 1

Colebrook on Bengal ryots

In many villages of Bengal, some of the powerful ryots did not cultivate, but instead gave out their lands to others (the under-tenants), taking from them very high rents. In 1880, H. T. Colebrook described the conditions of these under-tenants in Bengal:

> The under-tenants, depressed by an excessive rent in kind, and by usurious returns for the cattle, seed, and subsistence, advanced to them, can never extricate themselves from debt. In so abject a state, they cannot labour in spirit, while they earn a scanty subsistence without hope of bettering their situation.

The need to improve agriculture

If the economy was in ruins, could the Company be certain of its revenue income? Most Company officials began to feel that investment in land had to be encouraged and agriculture had to be improved.

How was this to be done? After two decades of debate on the question, the Company finally introduced the Permanent Settlement in 1793. By the terms of the settlement, the rajas and talugdars were recognised as zamindars. They were asked to collect rent from the peasants and pay revenue to the Company. The amount to be paid was fixed permanently, that is, it was not to be increased ever in future. It was felt that this would ensure a regular flow of revenue into the Company's coffers and at the same time encourage the zamindars to invest in improving the land. Since the revenue demand of the state would not be increased, the zamindar would benefit from increased production from the land.

The problem

The Permanent Settlement, however, created problems. Company officials soon discovered that the zamindars were in fact not investing in the improvement of land. The revenue that had been fixed was so high that the zamindars found it difficult to pay. Anyone who failed to pay the revenue lost his zamindari. Numerous zamindaris were sold off at auctions organised by the Company.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century the situation changed. The prices in the market rose and cultivation slowly expanded. This meant an increase in the income of the zamindars but no gain for the Company since it could not increase a revenue demand that had been fixed permanently

Even then the zamindars did not have an interest in improving the land. Some had lost their lands in the earlier years of the settlement; others now saw the possibility of earning without the trouble and risk of investment. As long as the zamindars could give out the land to tenants and get rent, they were not interested in improving the land.

Activity

Why do you think Colebrook is concerned with the conditions of the under-ryots in Bengal? Read the preceding pages and suggest possible reasons.

H.T. Colebrook.

On the other hand, in the villages, the cultivator found the system extremely oppressive. The rent he paid to the zamindar was high and his right on the land was insecure. To pay the rent he had to often take a loan from the moneylender, and when he failed to pay the rent he was evicted from the land he had cultivated for generations.

A new system is devised

By the early nineteenth century many of the Company officials were convinced that the system of revenue had to be changed again. How could revenues be fixed permanently at a time when the Company needed more money to meet its expenses of administration and trade?

In the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency (most of this area is now in Uttar Pradesh), an Englishman called Holt Mackenzie devised the new system which came into effect in 1822. He felt that the village was an important social institution in north Indian society and needed to be preserved. Under his directions, collectors went from village to village, inspecting the land, measuring the fields, and recording the customs and rights of different groups. The estimated revenue of each plot within a village was added up to calculate the revenue that each village (***mahal***) had to pay. This demand was to be revised periodically, not permanently fixed. The charge of collecting the revenue and paying it to the Company was given to the village headman, rather than the zamindar. This system came to be known as the *mahalwari* settlement.

The Munro system

In the British territories in the south there was a similar move away from the idea of Permanent Settlement. The new system that was devised came to be known as the *ryotwar* (or *ryotwari*). It was tried on a small scale by Captain Alexander Read in some of the areas that were taken over by the Company after the wars with Tipu Sultan. Subsequently developed by Thomas Munro, this system was gradually extended all over south India.

Read and Munro felt that in the south there were no traditional zamindars. The settlement, they argued, had to be made directly with the cultivators (ryots) who had tilled the land for generations. Their fields had to be carefully and separately surveyed before the revenue assessment was made. Munro thought that the British

***Mahal* –** In British revenue records *mahal* is a revenue estate which may be a village or a group of villages.

Fig. 4 – *Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras (1819-26)*

Activity

Imagine that you are a Company representative sending a report back to England about the conditions in rural areas under Company rule. What would you write?

should act as paternal father figures protecting the *ryots* under their charge.

All was not well

Within a few years after the new systems were imposed it was clear that all was not well with them. Driven by the desire to increase the income from land, revenue officials fixed too high a revenue demand. Peasants were unable to pay. *ryots* fled the countryside, and villages became deserted in many regions. Optimistic officials had imagined that the new systems would transform the peasants into rich enterprising farmers. But this did not happen.

Crops for Europe

The British also realised that the countryside could not only yield revenue, it could also grow the crops that Europe required. By the late eighteenth century the Company was trying its best to expand the cultivation of opium and indigo. In the century and a half that followed, the British persuaded or forced cultivators in various parts of India to produce other crops: jute in Bengal, tea in Assam, sugarcane in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), wheat in Punjab, cotton in Maharashtra and Punjab, rice in Madras.

How was this done? The British used a variety of methods to expand the cultivation of crops that they needed. Let us take a closer look at the story of one such crop, one such method of production.

Fig. 5 *– A kalamkari print, twentieth-century India*

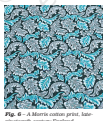


Fig. 6 *– A Morris cotton print, late-nineteenth-century England*

Does colour have a history?

Figs. 5 and 6 are two images of cotton prints. The image on the left (Fig. 5) shows a *kalamkari* print created by weavers of Andhra Pradesh in India. On the right is a floral cotton print designed and produced by William Morris, a famous poet and artist of nineteenth-century Britain. There is one thing common in the

two prints: both use a rich blue colour – commonly called indigo. Do you know how this colour was produced?

The blue that you see in these prints was produced from a plant called indigo. It is likely that the blue dye used in the Morris prints in nineteenth-century Britain was manufactured from indigo plants cultivated in India. For India was the biggest supplier of indigo in the world at that time.

Why the demand for Indian indigo?

The indigo plant grows primarily in the tropics. By the thirteenth century Indian indigo was being used by cloth manufacturers in Italy, France and Britain to dye cloth.

However, only small amounts of Indian indigo reached the European market and its price was very high. European cloth manufacturers therefore had to depend on another plant called woad to make violet and blue dyes. Being a plant of the temperate zones, woad was more easily available in Europe. It was grown in northern Italy, southern France and in parts of Germany and Britain. Worried by the competition from indigo, woad producers in Europe pressurised their governments to ban the import of indigo.

Cloth dyers, however, preferred indigo as a dye. Indigo produced a rich blue colour, whereas the dye from woad was pale and dull. By the seventeenth century, European cloth producers persuaded their governments to relax the ban on indigo import. The French began cultivating indigo in St Domingue in the Caribbean islands, the Portuguese in Brazil, the English in Jamaica, and the Spanish in Venezuela. Indigo **plantations** also came up in many parts of North America.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the demand for Indian indigo grew further. Britain began to industrialise, and its cotton production expanded dramatically, creating an enormous new demand for cloth dyes. While the demand for indigo increased, its existing supplies from the West Indies and America collapsed for a variety of reasons. Between 1783 and 1789 the production of indigo in the world fell by half. Cloth dyers in Britain now desperately looked for new sources of indigo supply.

From where could this indigo be procured?

Britain turns to India

Faced with the rising demand for indigo in Europe, the Company in India looked for ways to expand the area under indigo cultivation.

Plantation – A large farm operated by a planter employing various forms of forced labour. Plantations are associated with the production of coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, tea and cotton.

***Fig. 7** – The Slave Revolt in St Domingue, August 1791, painting by January Scuhodolski*

In the eighteenth century, French planters produced indigo and sugar in the French colony of St Domingue in the Caribbean islands. The African **slaves** who worked on the plantations rose in rebellion in 1791, burning the plantations and killing their rich planters. In 1792 France abolished slavery in the French colonies. These events led to the collapse of the indigo plantations on the Caribbean islands.

From the last decades of the eighteenth century indigo cultivation in Bengal expanded rapidly and Bengal indigo came to dominate the world market. In 1788 only about 30 per cent of the indigo imported into Britain was from India. By 1810, the proportion had gone up to 95 per cent.

As the indigo trade grew, commercial agents and officials of the Company began investing in indigo production. Over the years many Company officials left their jobs to look after their indigo business. Attracted by the prospect of high profits, numerous Scotsmen and Englishmen came to India and became planters. Those who had no money to produce indigo could get loans from the Company and the banks that were coming up at the time.

How was indigo cultivated?

There were two main systems of indigo cultivation – *nij* and *ryoti*. Within the system of *nij* cultivation, the planter produced indigo in lands that he directly controlled. He either bought the land or rented it from other zamindars and produced indigo by directly employing hired labourers.

The problem with *nij* cultivation

The planters found it difficult to expand the area under *nij* cultivation. Indigo could be cultivated only on fertile lands, and these were all already densely populated. Only small plots scattered over the landscape could be acquired. Planters needed large areas in compact blocks to cultivate indigo in plantations. Where could they get such land from? They attempted to lease in the land around the indigo factory, and evict the peasants from the area. But this always led to conflicts and tension.

Nor was labour easy to mobilise. A large plantation required a vast number of hands to operate. And labour was needed precisely at a time when peasants were usually busy with their rice cultivation.

Slave – A person who is owned by someone else – the slave owner. A slave has no freedom and is compelled to work for the master.

Nij cultivation on a large scale also required many ploughs and bullocks. One **bighа** of indigo cultivation required two ploughs. This meant that a planter with 1,000 *bighas* would need 2,000 ploughs. Investing on purchase and maintenance of ploughs was a big problem. Nor could supplies be easily got from the peasants since their ploughs and bullocks were busy on their *ryot* fields, again exactly at the time that the indigo planters needed them.

Till the late nineteenth century, planters were therefore reluctant to expand the area under *nij* cultivation. Less than 25 per cent of the land producing indigo was under this system. The rest was under an alternative mode of cultivation – the *ryoti* system.

Bighа – A unit of measurement of land. Before British rule, the size of this area varied. In Bengal the British standardised it to about one-third of an acre.

Indigo on the land of *ryots*

Under the *ryoti* system, the planters forced the *ryots* to sign a contract, an agreement (*patta*). At times they pressurised the village headmen to sign the contract on behalf of the *ryots*. Those who signed the contract got cash advances from the planters at low rates of interest to produce indigo. But the loan committed the *ryot* to cultivating indigo on at least 25 per cent of the area under his holding. The planter provided the seed and the drill, while the cultivators prepared the soil, sowed the seed and looked after the crop.

Fig. 8 *– Workers harvesting indigo in early nineteenth-century Bengal. From Colesworthy Grant,* Rural Life in Bengal, *1860*
In India the indigo plant was cut mostly by men.

Fig. 9 *– The Indigo plant being brought from the fields to the factory*

How was indigo produced?

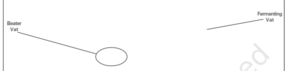


Fig. 10 – An indigo factory located near indigo fields, painting by William Simpson, 1863

The indigo villages were usually around indigo factories owned by planters. After harvest, the indigo plant was taken to the **vats** in the indigo factory. Three or four vats were needed to manufacture the dye. Each vat had a separate function. The leaves stripped off the indigo plant were first soaked in warm water in a vat (known as the fermenting or steeper vat) for several hours. When the plants fermented, the liquid began to boil and bubble. Now the rotten leaves were taken out and the liquid drained into another vat that was placed just below the first vat.

In the second vat (known as the beater vat) the solution was continuously stirred and beaten with paddles. When the liquid gradually turned green and then blue, lime water was added to the vat. Gradually the indigo separated out in flakes, a muddy sediment settled at the bottom of the vat and a clear liquid rose to the surface. The liquid was drained off and the sediment – the indigo pulp – transferred to another vat (known as the settling vat), and then pressed and dried for sale.

Fig. 11 *– Women usually carried the indigo plant to the vats.*

Fig. 12 *– The Vat-Beater*

The indigo worker here is standing with the paddle that was used to stir the solution in the vat. These workers had to remain in waist-deep water for over eight hours to beat the indigo solution.

Vat – A fermenting or storage vessel

Fig. 13 *– The indigo is ready for sale*

Here you can see the last stage of the production – workers stamping and cutting the indigo pulp that has been pressed and moulded. In the background you can see a worker carrying away the blocks for drying.

2020-21

Fig. 8

When the crop was delivered to the planter after the harvest, a new loan was given to the *ryot*, and the cycle started all over again. Peasants who were initially tempted by the loans soon realised how harsh the system was. The price they got for the indigo they produced was very low and the cycle of loans never ended.

There were other problems too. The planters usually insisted that indigo be cultivated on the best soils in which peasants preferred to cultivate rice. Indigo, moreover, had deep roots and it exhausted the soil rapidly. After an indigo harvest the land could not be sown with rice.

The "Blue Rebellion" and After

In March 1859 thousands of *ryots* in Bengal refused to grow indigo. As the rebellion spread, *ryots* refused to pay rents to the planters, and attacked indigo factories armed with swords and spears, bows and arrows. Women turned up to fight with pots, pans and kitchen implements. Those who worked for the planters were socially boycotted, and the *gomasthas* – agents of planters – who came to collect rent were beaten up. *Ryots* swore they would no longer take advances to sow indigo nor be bullied by the planters' *lathiyals* – the lathi-wielding strongmen maintained by the planters.

Why did the indigo peasants decide that they would no longer remain silent? What gave them the power to rebel? Clearly, the indigo system was intensely oppressive. But those who are oppressed do not always rise up in rebellion. They do so only at times.

In 1859, the indigo *ryots* felt that they had the support of the local zamindars and village headmen in their rebellion against the planters. In many villages, headmen who had been forced to sign indigo contracts, mobilised the indigo peasants and fought pitched battles with the *lathiyals*. In other places even the zamindars went around villages urging the *ryots* to resist the planters. These zamindars were unhappy with the increasing power of the planters and angry at being forced by the planters to give them land on long leases.

The indigo peasants also imagined that the British government would support them in their struggle against the planters. After the Revolt of 1857 the British government was particularly worried about the possibility of another popular rebellion. When the news spread of a simmering revolt in the indigo districts,

Source 2

A song from an indigo-producing village

In minutes of struggle people often sing songs to inspire each other and to build a sense of collective unity. Such songs give us a glimpse of their feelings. During the indigo rebellion many such songs could be heard in the villages of lower Bengal. Here is one such song:

> The long lathis wielded by the planter of Mollahati / now lie in a cluster
>
> The babus of Kolkata have sailed down / to see the great fight
>
> This time the ryots are all ready, / they will no longer be beaten in silence
>
> They will no longer give up their life / without fighting the *lathiyal*s.

the Lieutenant Governor toured the region in the winter of 1859. The *ryots* saw the tour as a sign of government sympathy for their plight. When in Barasat, the magistrate Ashley Eden issued a notice stating that *ryots* would not be compelled to accept indigo contracts, word went around that Queen Victoria had declared that indigo need not be sown. Eden was trying to placate the peasants and control an explosive situation, but his action was read as support for the rebellion.

As the rebellion spread, intellectuals from Calcutta rushed to the indigo districts. They wrote of the misery of the *ryots*, the tyranny of the planters, and the horrors of the indigo system.

Worried by the rebellion, the government brought in the military to protect the planters from assault, and set up the Indigo Commission to enquire into the system of indigo production. The Commission held the planters guilty, and criticised them for the coercive methods they used with indigo cultivators. It declared that indigo production was not profitable for *ryots*. The Commission asked the *ryots* to fulfil their existing contracts but also told them that they could refuse to produce indigo in future.

Source 2

"I would rather beg than sow indigo"

Hadji Mulla, an indigo cultivator of Chandpore, Thana Hardi, was interviewed by the members of the Indigo Commission on Tuesday, 5 June 1860. This is what he said in answer to some of the questions:

W.S. Seton Karr, President of the Indigo Commission: Are you now willing to sow indigo; and if not on what fresh terms would you be willing to do it?

Hadji Mulla: I am not willing to sow, and I don't know that any fresh terms would satisfy me.

Mr Sale: Would you not be willing to sow at 2 rupee a bundle?

Hadji Mulla: No I would not; rather than sow indigo I will go to another country; I would rather beg than sow indigo.

Indigo Commission Report, Vol. II, Minutes of Evidence, p. 47

Activity

Imagine you are a witness giving evidence before the Indigo Commission. W.S. Seton Karr asks you "On what condition will *ryots* grow indigo?" What will your answer be?

After the revolt, indigo production collapsed in Bengal. But the planters now shifted their operation to Bihar. With the discovery of synthetic dyes in the late nineteenth century their business was severely affected, but yet they managed to expand production. When Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa, a peasant from Bihar persuaded him to visit Champaran and see the plight of the indigo cultivators there. Mahatma Gandhi's visit in 1917 marked the beginning of the Champaran movement against the indigo planters.

ELSEWHERE

Indigo making in the West Indies

In the early eighteenth century, a French missionary, Jean Baptiste Labat, travelled to the Caribbean islands, and wrote extensively about the region. Published in one of his books, this image shows all the stages of indigo production in the French slave plantations of the region.

You can see the slave workers putting the indigo plant into the settler vat on the left. Another worker is churning the liquid with a mechanical churner in a vat (second from right). Two workers are carrying the indigo pulp hung up in bags to be dried. In the foreground two others are mixing the indigo pulp to be put into moulds. The planter is at the centre of the picture standing on the high ground supervising the slave workers.

***Fig. 1.4** – Making indigo in a Caribbean slave plantation*

Let's recall

1. Match the following:

ryot	village
mahal	peasant
raj	cultivation on *ryot's* lands
nyoti	cultivation on planter's own land

Let's imagine

Imagine a conversation between a planter and a peasant who is being forced to grow indigo. What reasons would the planter give to persuade the peasant? What problems would the peasant point out? Enact their conversation.

2. Fill in the blanks:
   (a) Growers of woad in Europe saw _____ as a crop which would provide competition to their earnings.
   (b) The demand for indigo increased in late-eighteenth-century Britain because of _____.
   (c) The international demand for indigo was affected by the discovery of _____.
   (d) The Champaran movement was against _____.

Let's discuss

3. Describe the main features of the Permanent Settlement.
4. How was the *mahalwari* system different from the Permanent Settlement?
5. Give two problems which arose with the new Munro system of fixing revenue.
6. Why were *ryots* reluctant to grow indigo?
7. What were the circumstances which led to the eventual collapse of indigo production in Bengal?

Let's do

8. Find out more about the Champaran movement and Mahatma Gandhi's role in it.
9. Look into the history of either tea or coffee plantations in India. See how the life of workers in these plantations was similar to or different from that of workers in indigo plantations.

4 Tribals, *Dikus* and the Vision of a Golden Age

In 1895, a man named Birsa was seen roaming the forests and villages of Chottanagpur in Jharkhand. People said he had miraculous powers – he could cure all diseases and multiply grain. Birsa himself declared that God had appointed him to save his people from trouble, free them from the slavery of *dikus* (outsiders). Soon thousands began following Birsa, believing that he was *bhagwan* (God) and had come to solve all their problems.

Birsa was born in a family of Mundas – a tribal group that lived in Chottanagpur. But his followers included other tribals of the region – Santhals and Oraons. All of them in different ways were unhappy with the changes they were experiencing and the problems they were facing under British rule. Their familiar ways of life seemed to be disappearing, their livelihoods were under threat, and their religion appeared to be in danger.

What problems did Birsa set out to resolve? Who were the outsiders being referred to as *dikus*, and how did they enslave the people of the region? What was happening to the tribal people under the British? How did their lives change? These are some of the questions you will read about in this chapter.

You have read about tribal societies last year. Most tribes had customs and rituals that were very different from those laid down by Brahmans. These societies also did not have the sharp social divisions that were characteristic of caste societies. All those who belonged to the same tribe thought of themselves as sharing common ties of kinship. However, this did not mean that there were no social and economic differences within tribes.

***Fig. 1** – Women of the Dongria Kondha tribe in Orissa wade through the river on the way to the market*

How Did Tribal Groups Live?

By the nineteenth century, tribal people in different parts of India were involved in a variety of activities.

Some were *jhum* cultivators

Some of them practised *jhum* cultivation, that is, shifting cultivation. This was done on small patches of land, mostly in forests. The cultivators cut the treetops to allow sunlight to reach the ground, and burnt the vegetation on the land to clear it for cultivation. They spread the ash from the firing, which contained potash, to fertilise the soil. They used the axe to cut trees and the hoe to scratch the soil in order to prepare it for cultivation. They broadcast the seeds, that is, scattered the seeds on the field instead of ploughing the land and sowing the seeds. Once the crop was ready and harvested, they moved to another field. A field that had been cultivated once was left **fallow** for several years.

Shifting cultivators were found in the hilly and forested tracts of north-east and central India. The lives of these tribal people depended on free movement within forests and on being able to use the land and forests for growing their crops. That is the only way they could practise shifting cultivation.

Fallow – A field left uncultivated for a while so that the soil recovers fertility

Sal – A tree

Mahua – A flower that is eaten or used to make alcohol

Some were hunters and gatherers

In many regions tribal groups lived by hunting animals and gathering forest produce. They saw forests as essential for survival. The Khonds were such a community living in the forests of Orissa. They regularly went out on collective hunts and then divided the meat amongst themselves. They ate fruits and roots collected from the forest and cooked food with the oil they extracted from the seeds of the **sal** and ***mahua***. They used many forest shrubs and herbs for medicinal purposes, and sold forest produce in the local markets. The local weavers and leather workers turned to the Khonds when they needed supplies of *kusum* and *palash* flowers to colour their clothes and leather.

Fig. 2 *- Dongria Kondhs context to Orissa take home pandanus leaves from the forest to make plates*

From where did these forest people get their supplies of rice and other grains? At times they exchanged goods – getting what they needed in return for their valuable forest produce. At other times they bought goods with the small amount of earnings they had. Some of them did odd jobs in the villages, carrying loads or building roads, while others laboured in the fields of peasants and farmers. When supplies of forest produce shrank, tribal people had to increasingly wander around in search of work as labourers. But many of them – like the Baigas of central India – were reluctant to do work for others. The Baigas saw themselves as people of the forest, who could only live on the produce of the forest. It was below the dignity of a Baiga to become a labourer.

Tribal groups often needed to buy and sell in order to be able to get the goods that were not produced within the locality. This led to their dependence on traders and moneylenders. Traders came around with things for sale, and sold the goods at high prices. Moneylenders gave loans with which the tribals met their cash needs, adding to what they earned. But the interest charged on the loans was usually very high. So for the tribals, market and commerce often meant debt and poverty. They therefore came to see the moneylender and trader as evil outsiders and the cause of their misery.

***Fig. 3** – Location of some tribal groups in India*

Some herded animals

Many tribal groups lived by herding and rearing animals. They were pastoralists who moved with their herds of cattle or sheep according to the seasons. When the grass in one place was exhausted, they moved to another area. The Van Gujjars of the Punjab hills and the Labadis of Andhra Pradesh were cattle herders, the Gaddis of Kulu were shepherds, and the Bakarwals of Kashmir reared goats. You will read more about them in your history book next year.

Source 1

A time to hunt, a time to sow, a time to move to a new field

Have you ever noticed that people living in different types of societies do not share the same notion of work and time? The lives of the shifting cultivators and hunters in different regions were regulated by a calendar and division of tasks for men and women.

Verrier Elwin, a British anthropologist who lived among the Baigas and Khonds of central India for many years in the 1930s and 1940s, gives us a picture of what this calendar and division of tasks was like. He writes:

> In *Chait* women went to clearings to ... cut stalks that were already reaped; men cut large trees and go for their ritual hunt. The hunt began at full moon from the east. Traps of bamboo were used for hunting. The women gathered fruits like sago, tamarind and mushroom. Baiga women can only gather roots or *kanda* and *aahua* seeds. Of all the *adivasis* in Central India, the Baigas were known as the best hunters ... In *Baisakh* the firing of the forest took place, the women gathered unburnt wood to burn. Men continued to hunt, but scarcer their villages. In *Jeth* sowing took place and hunting still went on. From *Asadh* to *Bhadon* the men worked in the fields. In *Kuar* the first fruits of beans were ripened and in *Kartik Aadh* became ripe. In *Aghan* every crop was ready and in *Pus* winnowing took place.
>
> *Pus* was also the time for dances and marriages. In *Magh* sheds were made to new *huisers* and hunting-gathering was the main subsistence activity.
>
> The cycle described above took place in the first year. In the second year there was more time for hunting as only a few crops had to be sown and harvested. But since there was enough food the men slept in the *huisers*. It was only in the third year that the diet had to be supplemented with the forest products.
>
> *Adapted from Verrier Elwin,* Baiga *(1939) and Elwin's unpublished 'Notes on the Khonds' (Verrier Elwin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)*

Fig. 4 – *A Santhal girl carrying firewood, Bihar, 1946*
Children go with their mothers to the forest to gather forest produce.

Activity

Look carefully at the tasks that Baiga men and women did. Do you see any pattern? What were the differences in the types of work that they were expected to perform?

Some took to settled cultivation

Even before the nineteenth century, many from within the tribal groups had begun settling down, and cultivating their fields in one place year after year, instead of moving from place to place. They began to use the plough, and gradually got rights over the land they lived on. In many cases, like the Mundas of Chotianagpur, the land belonged to the clan as a whole. All members of the clan were regarded as descendants of the original settlers, who had first cleared the land. Therefore, all of them had rights on the land. Very often some people within the clan acquired more power than others, some became chiefs and others followers. Powerful men often rented out their land instead of cultivating it themselves.

British officials saw settled tribal groups like the Gonds and Santhals as more civilised than hunter-gatherers or shifting cultivators. Those who lived in the forests were considered to be wild and savage: they needed to be settled and civilised.

How Did Colonial Rule Affect Tribal Lives?

The lives of tribal groups changed during British rule. Let us see what these changes were.

What happened to tribal chiefs?

Before the arrival of the British, in many areas the tribal chiefs were important people. They enjoyed a certain amount of economic power and had the right to administer and control their territories. In some places they had their own police and decided on the local rules of land and forest management. Under British rule, the functions and powers of the tribal chiefs changed considerably. They were allowed to keep their land titles over a cluster of villages and rent out lands, but they lost much of their administrative power and were forced to follow laws made by British officials in India. They also had to pay tribute to the British, and discipline the tribal groups on behalf of the British. They lost the authority they had earlier enjoyed amongst their people, and were unable to fulfil their traditional functions.

What happened to the shifting cultivators?

The British were uncomfortable with groups who moved about and did not have a fixed home. They wanted tribal

Bewar – A term used in Madhya Pradesh for shifting cultivation

Fig. 3 *– A log house being built in a village of the Nishi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.*
The entire village helps when log huts are built.

***Fig. 6** – Bhil women cultivating in a forest in Gujarat*
Shifting cultivation continues in many forest areas of Gujarat. You can see that trees have been cut and land cleared to create patches for cultivation.

groups to settle down and become peasant cultivators. Settled peasants were easier to control and administer than people who were always on the move. The British also wanted a regular revenue source for the state. So they introduced land settlements – that is, they measured the land, defined the rights of each individual to that land, and fixed the revenue demand for the state. Some peasants were declared landowners, others tenants. As you have seen (Chapter 2), the tenants were to pay rent to the landowner who in turn paid revenue to the state.

The British effort to settle *jhum* cultivators was not very successful. Settled plough cultivation is not easy in areas where water is scarce and the soil is dry. In fact, *jhum* cultivators who took to plough cultivation often suffered, since their fields did not produce good yields. So the *jhum* cultivators in north-east India insisted on continuing with their traditional practice. Facing widespread protests, the British had to ultimately allow them the right to carry on shifting cultivation in some parts of the forest.

***Fig. 7** – Tribal workers in a rice field in Andhra Pradesh*
Note the difference between rice cultivation in the flat plains and in the forests.

Forest laws and their impact

The life of tribal groups, as you have seen, was directly connected to the forest. So changes in forest laws had a considerable effect on tribal lives. The British extended their control over all forests and declared that forests were state property. Some forests were classified as Reserved Forests for they produced timber which the British wanted. In these forests people were not allowed to move freely, practise *jhum* cultivation, collect fruits, or hunt animals. How were *jhum* cultivators to survive in such a situation? Many were therefore forced to move to other areas in search of work and livelihood.

But once the British stopped the tribal people from living inside forests, they faced a problem. From where would the Forest Department get its labour to cut trees for railway sleepers and to transport logs?

Colonial officials came up with a solution. They decided that they would give *jhum* cultivators small patches of land in the forests and allow them to cultivate these on the condition that those who lived in the villages would have to provide labour to the Forest Department and look after the forests. So in many regions the Forest Department established forest villages to ensure a regular supply of cheap labour.

Sleeper – The horizontal planks of wood on which railway lines are laid

Source 2

"In this land of the English how hard it is to live"

In the1930s Verrier Elwin visited the land of the Baigas – a tribal group in central India. He wanted to know about them – their customs and practices, their art and folklore. He recorded many songs that lamented the hard time the Baigas were having under British rule.

In this land of the English how hard it is to live
How hard it is to live
In the village sits the landlord
In the gate sits the Kotwar
In the garden sits the Patwari
In the field sits the government

In this land of the English how hard it is to live
To pay cattle tax we have to sell cow
To pay forest tax we have to sell buffalo
To pay land tax we have to sell bullock
How are we to get our food?
In this land of the English

Quoted in Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hivale, Songs of the Maikal, *p. 316.*

Fig. 8 – Godava women weaving

Many tribal groups reacted against the colonial forest laws. They disobeyed the new rules, continued with practices that were declared illegal, and at times rose in open rebellion. Such was the revolt of Songram Sangma in 1906 in Assam, and the forest satyagraha of the 1930s in the Central Provinces.

The problem with trade

During the nineteenth century, tribal groups found that traders and money-lenders were coming into the forests more often, wanting to buy forest produce, offering cash loans, and asking them to work for wages. It took tribal groups some time to understand the consequences of what was happening.

Let us consider the case of the silk growers. In the eighteenth century, Indian silk was in demand in European markets. The fine quality of Indian silk was highly valued and exports from India increased rapidly. As the market expanded, East India Company officials tried to encourage silk production to meet the growing demand.

Hazaribagh, in present-day Jharkhand, was an area where the Santhals reared cocoons. The traders dealing in silk sent in their agents who gave loans to the tribal people and collected the cocoons. The growers were paid Rs 3 to Rs 4 for a thousand cocoons. These were then exported to Burdwan or Gaya where they were sold at five times the price. The middlemen – so called because they arranged deals between the exporters and silk growers – made huge profits. The silk growers earned very little. Understandably, many tribal groups saw the market and the traders as their main enemies.

***Fig. 9** – A Majang woman weaving a mat*

For women, domestic work was not confined to the home. They carried their babies with them to the fields and the factories.

2020-21

***Fig. 10** – Coal miners of Bihar, 1948*

In the 1920s about 50 per cent of the miners in the Jharia and Raniganj coal fields of Bihar were tribals. Work deep down in the dark and suffocating mines was not only back-breaking and dangerous, it was often literally killing. In the 1920s over 2,000 workers died every year in the coal mines in India.

The search for work

The plight of the tribals who had to go far away from their homes in search of work was even worse. From the late nineteenth century, tea plantations started coming up and mining became an important industry. Tribals were recruited in large numbers to work the tea plantations of Assam and the coal mines of Jharkhand. They were recruited through contractors who paid them miserably low wages, and prevented them from returning home.

A Closer Look

Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tribal groups in different parts of the country rebelled against the changes in laws, the restrictions on their practices, the new taxes they had to pay, and the exploitation by traders and moneylenders. The Kols rebelled in 1831-32, Santhals rose in revolt in 1855, the Bastar Rebellion in central India broke out in 1910 and the Warli Revolt in Maharashtra in 1940. The movement that Birsa led was one such movement.

Activity

Find out whether the conditions of work in the mines have changed now. Check how many people die in mines every year, and what are the reasons for their death.

Source 2

'Blood trickles from my shoulders'

The songs the Mundas sang bemoaned their misery.

> Alas! under [the drudgery of] forced labour
> Blood trickles from my shoulders
> Day and night the canvassy from the zamindars,
> Annoys and irritates me, day and night I groan
> Alas! This is my condition
> I do not have a home, where shall I get happiness
> Alas!

K.S. Singh, Birsa Munda and His Movement, *p.12.*

Vaishnav – Worshippers of Vishnu

Birsa Munda

Birsa was born in the mid-1870s. The son of a poor father, he grew up around the forests of Bohonda, grazing sheep, playing the flute, and dancing in the local *akhara*. Forced by poverty, his father had to move from place to place looking for work. As an adolescent, Birsa heard tales of the Munda uprisings of the past and saw the *sardars* (leaders) of the community urging the people to revolt. They talked of a golden age when the Mundas had been free of the oppression of *dikus*, and said there would be a time when the ancestral right of the community would be restored. They saw themselves as the descendants of the original settlers of the region, fighting for their land (*mulk ki ladai*), reminding people of the need to win back their kingdom.

Birsa went to the local missionary school, and listened to the sermons of missionaries. There too he heard it said that it was possible for the Mundas to attain the Kingdom of Heaven, and regain their lost rights. This would be possible if they became good Christians and gave up their "bad practices". Later Birsa also spent some time in the company of a prominent **Vaishnav** preacher. He wore the sacred thread, and began to value the importance of purity and piety.

Birsa was deeply influenced by many of the ideas he came in touch with in his growing-up years. His movement was aimed at reforming tribal society. He urged the Mundas to give up drinking liquor, clean their village, and stop believing in witchcraft and sorcery. But we must remember that Birsa also turned against missionaries and Hindu landlords. He saw them as outside forces that were ruining the Munda way of life.

In 1895 Birsa urged his followers to recover their glorious past. He talked of a golden age in the past – a *satyug* (the age of truth) – when Mundas lived a good life, constructed embankments, tapped natural springs, planted trees and orchards, practised cultivation to earn their living. They did not kill their brethren and relatives. They lived honestly. Birsa also wanted people to once again work on their land, settle down and cultivate their fields.

What worried British officials most was the political aim of the Birsa movement, for it wanted to drive out missionaries, moneylenders, Hindu landlords, and the government and set up a Munda Raj with Birsa at its head. The movement identified all these forces as the cause of the misery the Mundas were suffering.

The land policies of the British were destroying their traditional land system, Hindu landlords and moneylenders were taking over their land, and missionaries were criticising their traditional culture.

As the movement spread the British officials decided to act. They arrested Birsa in 1895, convicted him on charges of rioting and jailed him for two years.

When Birsa was released in 1897 he began touring the villages to gather support. He used traditional symbols and language to rouse people, urging them to destroy "Ravana" (dikus and the Europeans) and establish a kingdom under his leadership. Birsa's followers began targeting the symbols of diku and European power. They attacked police stations and churches, and raided the property of moneylenders and zamindars. They raised the white flag as a symbol of Birsa Raj.

In 1900 Birsa died of cholera and the movement faded out. However, the movement was significant in at least two ways. First – it forced the colonial government to introduce laws so that the land of the tribals could not be easily taken over by dikus. Second – it showed once again that the tribal people had the capacity to protest against injustice and express their anger against colonial rule. They did this in their own specific way, inventing their own rituals and symbols of struggle.

Let's recall

1. Fill in the blanks:
   (a) The British described the tribal people as _____.
   (b) The method of sowing seeds in *jhum* cultivation is known as _____.
   (c) The tribal chiefs got _____ titles in central India under the British land settlements.
   (d) Tribals went to work in the _____ of Assam and the _____ in Bihar.

ELSEWHERE

Why do we need cash!

These are many reasons why tribal people trade. Perhaps often do not wish to produce for the market. This tribal song from Papua New Guinea gives us a glimpse of how the tribals there viewed the market.

We say cash,
Is unsatisfactory trash;
It won't keep off rain
And it gives me pain

So why should I work my guts
From coconut trees
For these government nuts;

Cash cropping is all very well
If you've got something to sell
But tell me sir why,
If there's nothing to buy;
Should I bother?

Adapted from a song quoted in Colin, Clarke-and Hameli, eds, *The Economy of Subsistence Agriculture*, (1970).

Let's imagine

Imagine you are a *jhum* cultivator living in a forest village in the nineteenth century. You have just been told that the land you were born on no longer belongs to you. In a meeting with British officials you try to explain the kinds of problems you face. What would you say?

2. State whether true or false:
   (a) *Jhum* cultivators plough the land and sow seeds.
   (b) Cocoons were bought from the Santhals and sold by the traders at five times the purchase price.
   (c) Birsa urged his followers to purify themselves, give up drinking liquor and stop believing in witchcraft and sorcery.
   (d) The British wanted to preserve the tribal way of life.

Let's discuss

3. What problems did shifting cultivators face under British rule?
4. How did the powers of tribal chiefs change under colonial rule?
5. What accounts for the anger of the tribals against the dikus?
6. What was Birsa's vision of a golden age? Why do you think such a vision appealed to the people of the region?

Let's do

7. Find out from your parents, friends or teachers, the names of some heroes of other tribal revolts in the twentieth century. Write their story in your own words.
8. Choose any tribal group living in India today. Find out about their customs and way of life, and how their lives have changed in the last 50 years.

5 When People Rebel
1857 and After

Fig. 1 – Sepoys and peasants gather forces for the revolt that spread across the plains of north India in 1857

Policies and the People

In the previous chapters you looked at the policies of the East India Company and the effect they had on different people. Kings, queens, peasants, landlords, tribals, soldiers were all affected in different ways. You have also seen how people resist policies and actions that harm their interests or go against their sentiments.

Nawabs lose their power

Since the mid-eighteenth century, nawabs and rajas had seen their power erode. They had gradually lost their authority and honour. Residents had been stationed in many courts, the freedom of the rulers reduced, their armed forces disbanded, and their revenues and territories taken away by stages.

Many ruling families tried to negotiate with the Company to protect their interests. For example, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi wanted the Company to recognise her adopted son as the heir to the kingdom after the death of her husband. Nana Saheb, the adopted son of

Peshwa Baji Rao II, pleaded that he be given his father's pension when the latter died. However, the Company, confident of its superiority and military powers, turned down these pleas.

Awadh was one of the last territories to be annexed. In 1801, a subsidiary alliance was imposed on Awadh, and in 1856 it was taken over. Governor-General Dalhousie declared that the territory was being misgoverned and British rule was needed to ensure proper administration.

The Company even began to plan how to bring the Mughal dynasty to an end. The name of the Mughal king was removed from the coins minted by the Company. In 1849, Governor-General Dalhousie announced that after the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the family of the king would be shifted out of the Red Fort and given another place in Delhi to reside in. In 1856, Governor-General Canning decided that Bahadur Shah Zafar would be the last Mughal king and after his death none of his descendants would be recognised as kings – they would just be called princes.

The peasants and the sepoys

In the countryside peasants and zamindars resented the high taxes and the rigid methods of revenue collection. Many failed to pay back their loans to the moneylenders and gradually lost the lands they had tilled for generations.

The Indian sepoys in the employ of the Company also had reasons for discontent. They were unhappy about their pay, allowances and conditions of service. Some of the new rules, moreover, violated their religious sensibilities and beliefs. Did you know that in those days many people in the country believed that if they crossed the sea they would lose their religion and caste? So when in 1824 the sepoys were told to go to Burma by the sea route to fight for the Company, they refused to follow the order, though they agreed to go by the land route. They were severely punished, and since the issue did not die down, in 1856 the Company passed a new law which stated that every new person who took up employment in the Company's army had to agree to serve overseas if required.

Sepoys also reacted to what was happening in the countryside. Many of them were peasants and had families living in the villages. So the anger of the peasants quickly spread among the sepoys.

Activity

Imagine you are a sepoy in the Company army, advising your nephew not to take employment in the army. What reasons would you give?

Responses to reforms

The British believed that Indian society had to be reformed. Laws were passed to stop the practice of sati and to encourage the remarriage of widows. English-language education was actively promoted. After 1830, the Company allowed Christian missionaries to function freely in its domain and even own land and property. In 1850, a new law was passed to make conversion to Christianity easier. This law allowed an Indian who had converted to Christianity to inherit the property of his ancestors. Many Indians began to feel that the British were destroying their religion, their social customs and their traditional way of life.

There were of course other Indians who wanted to change existing social practices. You will read about these reformers and reform movements in Chapter 7.

Fig. 2 *– Sepoys exchange news and rumours in the barracks of North India*

Through the Eyes of the People

To get a glimpse of what people were thinking those days about British rule, study Sources 1 and 2.

Source 1

The list of eighty-four rules

Given here are excerpts from the book *Majha Pravaas*, written by Vishnubhatt Godse, a Brahman from a village in Maharashtra. He and his uncle had set out to attend a yajna being organised in Mathura. Vishnubhatt writes that they met some sepoys on the way who told them that they should not proceed on the journey because a massive upheaval was going to break out in three days. The sepoys said:

> the English were determined to wipe out the religions of the Hindus and the Muslims ... they had made a list of eighty-four rules and announced these in a gathering of all big kings and princes in Calcutta. They said that the kings refused to accept these rules and warned the English of dire consequences and massive upheaval if these are implemented ... that the kings all returned to their capitals in great anger ... all the big people began making plans. A date was fixed for the war of religion and the secret plan had been circulated from the cantonment in Meerut by letters sent to different cantonments.

Vishnubhatt Godse, Majha Pravaas, *pp. 23-24.*

Source 2

"There was soon excitement in every regiment"

Another account we have from those days are the memoirs of Subedar Sitaram Pande. Sitaram Pande was recruited in 1812 as a sepoy in the Bengal Native Army. He served the English for 48 years and retired in 1860. He helped the British to suppress the rebellion though his own son was a rebel and was killed by the British in front of his eyes. On retirement he was persuaded by his Commanding Officer, Norgate, to write his memoirs. He completed the writing in 1861 in Awadhi and Norgate translated it into English and had it published under the title *From Sepoy to Subedar*.
Here is an excerpt from what Sitaram Pande wrote:

> It is my humble opinion that this seizing of Oudh filled the minds of the Sepoys with distrust and led them to plot against the Government. Agents of the Nawab of Oudh and also of the King of Delhi were sent all over India to discover the temper of the army. They worked upon the feelings of sepoys, telling them how treacherously the foreigners had behaved towards their king. They invented ten thousand lies and promises to persuade the soldiers to mutiny and turn against their masters, the English, with the object of restoring the Emperor of Delhi to the throne. They maintained that this was wholly within the army's powers if the soldiers would only act together and do as they were advised.

***Fig. 3** – Rebel sepoys at Meerut attack officers, enter their homes and set fire to buildings*

Source 2 contd.

Source 2 contd.

It chanced that about this time the Sarkar sent parties of men from each regiment to different garrisons for instructions in the use of the new rifle. These men performed the new drill for some time until a report got about by some means or the other, that the cartridges used for these new rifles were greased with the fat of cows and pigs. The men from our regiment wrote to others in the regiment telling them about this, and there was soon excitement in every regiment. Some men pointed out that in forty years' service nothing had ever been done by the Sarkar to insult their religion, but as I have already mentioned the sepoys' minds had been inflamed by the seizure of Oudh. Interested parties were quick to point out that the great aim of the English was to turn us all into Christians, and they had therefore introduced the cartridge in order to bring this about, since both Mahommedans and Hindus would be defiled by using it.

The Colonel sahib was of the opinion that the excitement, which even he could not fail to see, would pass off, as it had done before, and he recommended me to go to my home.

Sitoram Pande, From Sepoy to Subedar, *pp. 162-63*

Activity

1. What were the important concerns in the minds of the people according to Sitaram and according to Vishnubhatt?
2. What role did they think the rulers were playing? What role did the sepoys seem to play?

A Mutiny Becomes a Popular Rebellion

Though struggles between rulers and the ruled are not unusual, sometimes such struggles become quite widespread as a popular resistance so that the power of the state breaks down. A very large number of people begin to believe that they have a common enemy and rise up against the enemy at the same time. For such a situation to develop people have to organise, communicate, take initiative and display the confidence to turn the situation around.

Such a situation developed in the northern parts of India in 1857. After a hundred years of conquest and administration, the English East India Company faced a massive rebellion that started in May 1857 and threatened the Company's very presence in India. Sepoys mutinied in several places beginning from Meerut and a large number of people from different sections of society rose up in rebellion. Some regard it as the biggest armed resistance to colonialism in the nineteenth century anywhere in the world.

Mutiny – When soldiers as a group disobey their officers in the army

Fig. 4 *– The battle in the cavalry lines*
On the evening of 3 July 1857, over 3,000 rebels came from Bareilly, crossed the river Jamuna, entered Delhi, and reached the Mughal cavalry posts. The battle continued all through the night.

Fig. 5 *– Postal stamp issued in commemoration of Mangal Pandey*

Firangis – Foreigners The term reflects an attitude of contempt.

From Meerut to Delhi

On 29 March 1857, a young soldier, Mangal Pandey, was hanged to death for attacking his officers in Barrackpore. Some days later, some sepoys of the regiment at Meerut refused to do the army drill using the new cartridges, which were suspected of being coated with the fat of cows and pigs. Eighty-five sepoys were dismissed from service and sentenced to ten years in jail for disobeying their officers. This happened on 9 May 1857.

The response of the other Indian soldiers in Meerut was quite extraordinary. On 10 May, the soldiers marched to the jail in Meerut and released the imprisoned sepoys. They attacked and killed British officers. They captured guns and ammunition and set fire to the buildings and properties of the British and declared war on the ***firangis***. The soldiers were determined to bring an end to their rule in the country. But who would rule the land instead? The soldiers had an answer to this question – the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar.

The sepoys of Meerut rode all night of 10 May to reach Delhi in the early hours next morning. As news of their arrival spread, the regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion. Again british officers were killed, arms and ammunition seized, buildings set on fire. Triumphant soldiers gathered around the walls of the Red Fort where the Badshah lived, demanding to meet him. The emperor was not quite willing to challenge the mighty British power but the soldiers persisted. They forced their way into the palace and proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar as their leader.

The ageing emperor had to accept this demand. He wrote letters to all the chiefs and rulers of the country to come forward and organise a confederacy of Indian states to fight the British. This single step taken by Bahadur Shah had great implications.

The Mughal dynasty had ruled over a very large part of the country. Most smaller rulers and chieftains controlled different territories on behalf of the Mughal ruler. Threatened by the expansion of British rule, many of them felt that if the Mughal emperor could rule again, they too would be able to rule their own territories once more, under Mughal authority.

The British had not expected this to happen. They thought the disturbance caused by the issue of the cartridges would die down. But Bahadur Shah Zafar's decision to bless the rebellion changed the entire situation dramatically. Often when people see an alternative possibility they feel inspired and enthused. It gives them the courage, hope and confidence to act.

Fig. 6 - Bahadur Shah Zafar

Fig. 7 - Rani Laxmibai

The rebellion spreads

After the British were routed from Delhi, there was no uprising for almost a week. It took that much time for news to travel. Then, a spurt of mutinies began.

Regiment after regiment mutinied and took off to join other troops at nodal points like Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow. After them, the people of the towns and villages also rose up in rebellion and rallied around local leaders, zamindars and chiefs who were prepared to establish their authority and fight the British. Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the late Peshwa Baji Rao, who lived near Kanpur, gathered armed forces and expelled the British garrison from the city. He proclaimed himself Peshwa. He declared that he was a governor under Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. In Lucknow, Birjis Qadr, the son of the deposed Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, was proclaimed the new Nawab. He too acknowledged the suzerainty of Bahadur Shah Zafar. His mother Begum Hazrat Mahal took an active part in organising the uprising against the British. In Jhansi, Rani Lakshmibai joined the rebel sepoys and

Fig. 8 - As the mutiny spread, British officers were killed in the controversies

Activity

1. Why did the Mughal emperor agree to support the rebels?
2. Write a paragraph on the assessment he may have made before accepting the offer of the sepoys.

Fig. 9 *– A portrait of Nana Saheb*

fought the British along with Tantia Tope, the general of Nana Saheb. In the Mandla region of Madhya Pradesh, Rani Avanitbai Lodhi of Ramgarh raised and led an army of four thousand against the British who had taken over the administration of her state.

The British were greatly outnumbered by the rebel forces. They were defeated in a number of battles. This convinced the people that the rule of the British had collapsed for good and gave them the confidence to take the plunge and join the rebellion. A situation of wide-spread popular rebellion developed in the region of Awadh in particular. On 6 August 1857, we find a telegram sent by Lieutenant Colonel Tytler to his Commander-in-Chief expressing the fear felt by the British: "Our men are cowed by the numbers opposed to them and the endless fighting. Every village is held against us, the zamindars have risen to oppose us."

Many new leaders came up. For example, Ahmadullah Shah, a maulvi from Faizabad, prophesied that the rule of the British would come to an end soon. He caught the imagination of the people and raised a huge force of supporters. He came to Lucknow to fight the British. In Delhi, a large number of ghazis or religious warriors came together to wipe out the white people. Bakht Khan, a soldier from Bareilly, took charge of a large force of fighters who came to Delhi. He became a key military leader of the rebellion. In Bihar, an old zamindar, Kunwar Singh, joined the rebel sepoys and battled with the British for many months. Leaders and fighters from across the land joined the fight.

The Company Fights Back

Unnerved by the scale of the upheaval, the Company decided to repress the revolt with all its might. It brought

Fig. 10 *–*
A portrait of Vir Kunwar Singh

Fig. 11 *– British forces attack the rebels who had occupied the Red Fort (on the right) and Salimgarh Fort in Delhi (on the left)*

Fig. 12 – The siege train reaches Delhi.

The British forces initially found it difficult to break through the heavy fortification in Delhi. On 3 September 1857 reinforcements arrived – a 7 mile-long siege train comprising cartloads of cannon and ammunition pulled by elephants.

reinforcements from England, passed new laws so that the rebels could be convicted with ease, and then moved into the storm centres of the revolt. Delhi was recaptured from the rebel forces in September 1857. The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar was tried in court and sentenced to life imprisonment. He and his wife Begum Zinat Mahal were sent to prison in Rangoon in October 1858. Bahadur Shah Zafar died in the Rangoon jail in November 1862.

The recapture of Delhi, however, did not mean that the rebellion died down after that. People continued to resist and battle the British. The British had to fight for two years to suppress the massive forces of popular rebellion.

Lucknow was taken in March 1858. Rani Lakshmibai was defeated and killed in June 1858. A similar fate awaited Rani Avantibai, who after initial victory in Kheri, chose to embrace death when surrounded by the British on all sides. Tantia Tope escaped to the jungles of central India and continued to fight a guerrilla war with the support of many tribal and peasant leaders. He was captured, tried and killed in April 1859.

Just as victories against the British had earlier encouraged rebellion, the defeat of rebel forces encouraged desertions. The British also tried their best to win back the loyalty of the people. They announced rewards for loyal landholders would be allowed to continue to enjoy traditional rights over their lands. Those who had rebelled were told that if they submitted to the British, and if they had not killed any white people,

Fig. 13 – Postal stamp issued in commemoration of Tantia Tope

Activity

Make a list of places where the uprising took place in May, June and July 1857.

***Fig. 14** – British troops blow up Kashmere Gate to enter Delhi*

they would remain safe and their rights and claims to land would not be denied. Nevertheless, hundreds of sepoys, rebels, nawabs and rajas were tried and hanged.

***Fig. 15** – British forces capture the rebels near Kanpur*
Notice the way the artist shows the British soldiers valiantly advancing on the rebel forces.

Aftermath

The British had regained control of the country by the end of 1859, but they could not carry on ruling the land with the same policies any more.

Given below are the important changes that were introduced by the British.

1. The British Parliament passed a new Act in 1858 and transferred the powers of the East India Company to the British Crown in order to ensure a more responsible management of Indian affairs. A member of the British Cabinet was appointed Secretary of State for India and made responsible for all matters related to the governance of India. He was given a council to advise him, called the India Council. The Governor-General of India was given the title of Viceroy, that is, a personal representative of the Crown. Through these measures the British government accepted direct responsibility for ruling India.

2. All ruling chiefs of the country were assured that their territory would never be annexed in future. They were allowed to pass on their kingdoms to their heirs, including adopted sons. However, they were made to acknowledge the British Queen as their Sovereign Paramount. Thus the Indian rulers were to hold their kingdoms as subordinates of the British Crown.

3. It was decided that the proportion of Indian soldiers in the army would be reduced and the number of European soldiers would be increased. It was also decided that instead of recruiting soldiers from Awadh, Bihar, central India and south India, more soldiers would be recruited from among the Gurkhas, Sikhs and Pathans.

4. The land and property of Muslims was confiscated on a large scale and they were treated with suspicion and hostility. The British believed that they were responsible for the rebellion in a big way.

5. The British decided to respect the customary religious and social practices of the people in India.

6. Policies were made to protect landlords and zamindars and give them security of rights over their lands.

Thus a new phase of history began after 1857.

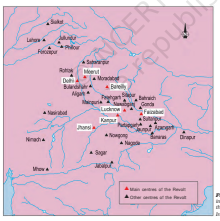


***Fig. 16** – Some important centres of the Revolt in North India*

The Khurda Uprising – A Case Study

Much before the event of 1857, there had taken place another event of a similar nature at a place called Khurda in 1817. Here, it would be instructive for us to study that event and reflect on how resentment against the colonial policies of the British had been building up since the beginning of the 19th century in different parts of the country.

Khurda, a small kingdom built up in the late 16th century in the south-eastern part of Odisha, was a populous and well-cultivated territory consisting of 105 *garhs*, 60 large and 1109 small villages at the beginning of the 19th century. Its king, Raja Birakishore Dev had to earlier give up the possession of four *parganas*, the superintendence of the Jagannath Temple and the administration of fourteen *garjats* (Princely States) to the Marathas under compulsion. His son and successor, Mukunda Dev II was greatly disturbed with this loss of fortune. Therefore, sensing an opportunity in the Anglo-Maratha conflict, he had entered into negotiations with the British to get back his lost territories and the rights over the Jagannath Temple. But after the occupation of Odisha in 1803, the British showed no inclination to oblige him on either score. Consequently, in alliance with other *kanhujotey* chiefs of Odisha and secret support of the Marathas, he tried to assert his rights by force. This led to his deposition and annexation of his territories by the British. As a matter of consolation, he was only given the rights of management of the Jagannath Temple with a grant amounting to a mere one-tenth of the revenue of his former estate and his residence was fixed at Puri. This unfair settlement commenced an era of oppressive foreign rule in Odisha, which paved the way for a serious armed uprising in 1817.

Soon after taking over Khurda, the British followed a policy of resuming service tenures. It bitterly affected the lives of the ex-nobility of the state, the *Paiks*. The severity of the measure was compounded on account of an unreasonable increase in the demand of revenue and also the oppressive ways of its collection. Consequently, there was large scale desertion of people from Khurda between 1803 and 1817. Yet, the British went for a series of short-term settlements, each time increasing the demands, not recognising either the productive capacity of the land or the paying capacity of the *ryots*. No leniency was shown even in case of natural calamities, which Odisha was frequently prone to. Rather, lands of defaulters were sold off to scheming revenue officials or speculators from Bengal.

The hereditary Military-Commander of the deposed king, Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mahapatra Bhramarbar Rai or Bxxi Jagabandhu as he was popularly known, was one among the dispossessed land-holders. He had in effect become a beggar, and for nearly two years survived on voluntary contributions from the people of Khurda before deciding to fight for their grievances as well as his own. Over the years, what had added to these grievances were (a) the introduction of *sicca* rupee (silver currency) in the region, (b) the insistence on payment of revenue in the new currency, (c) an unprecedented rise in the prices of food-stuff and salt, which had become far-fetched following the introduction of salt monopoly because of which the traditional salt makers of Odisha were deprived of making salt, and (d) the auction of local estates in Calcutta, which brought in absentee landlords from Bengal to Odisha. Besides, the insensitive and corrupt police system also made the situation worse for the aroused uprising to take a sinister shape.

The uprising was set off on 29 March 1817 as the *Paiks* attacked the police station and other government establishments at Ranpur killing more than a hundred men and took away a large amount of government money. Soon its ripples spread in different directions with Khurda becoming its epicenter. The *zamindars* and *ryots* alike joined the *Paiks* with enthusiasm. Those who did not, were taken to task. A 'no-rent campaign' was also started. The British tried to dislodge the *Paiks* from their entrenched position but failed. On 14

April 1817, Buxi Jagabandhu, leading five to ten thousand *Paiks* and men of the Kandh tribe seized Puri and declared the hesitant king, Mukunda Dev II as their ruler. The priests of the Jagannath Temple also extended the *Paiks* their full support.

Seeing the situation going out of hand, the British clamped Martial Law. The King was quickly captured and sent to prison in Cuttack with his son. The Buxi with his close associate, Krushna Chandra Bhramarabar Rai, tried to cut off all communications between Cuttack and Khurda as the uprising spread to the southern and the north-western parts of Odisha. Consequently, the British sent Major-General Martindell to clear off the area from the clutches of the *Paiks* while at the same time announcing rewards for the arrest of Buxi jagabandhu and his associates. In the ensuing operation hundreds of *Paiks* were killed, many fled to deep jungles and some returned home under a scheme of amnesty. Thus by May 1817 the uprising was mostly contained.

However, outside Khurda it was sustained by Buxi Jagabandhu with the help of supporters like the Raja of Kujung and the unflinching loyalty of the *Paiks* until his surrender in May 1825. On their part, the British henceforth adopted a policy of 'leniency, indulgence and forbearance' towards the people of Khurda. The price of salt was reduced and necessary reforms were made in the police and the justice systems. Revenue officials found to be corrupt were dismissed from service and former land-holders were restored to their lands. The son of the king of Khurda, Ram Chandra Dev III was allowed to move to Puri and take charge of the affairs of the Jagannath Temple with a grant of rupees twenty-four thousand.

In sum, it was the first such popular anti-British armed uprising in Odisha, which had far reaching effect on the future of British administration in that part of the country. To merely call it a 'Paik Rebellion' will thus be an understatement.

ELSEWHERE

For a Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace

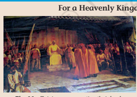


Fig. 11 *– Taiping army meeting their leader*

While the revolt was spreading in India in 1857, a massive popular uprising was raging in the southern parts of China. It had started in 1850 and could be suppressed only by the mid-1860s. Thousands of labouring, poor people were led by Hong Xiuquan to fight for the establishment of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. This was known as the Taiping Rebellion.

Hong Xiuquan was a convert to Christianity and was against the traditional religions practised in China such as Confucianism and Buddhism. The rebels of Taiping wanted to establish a kingdom where a form of Christianity was practised, where no one held any private property, where there was no difference between social classes and between men and women, where consumption of opium, tobacco, alcohol, and activities like gambling, prostitution, slavery, were prohibited.

The British and French armed forces operating in China helped the emperor of the Qing dynasty to put down the Taiping Rebellion.

Let's imagine

Imagine you are a British officer in Awadh during the rebellion. What would you do to keep your plans of fighting the rebels a top secret.

Let's recall

1. What was the demand of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi that was refused by the British?
2. What did the British do to protect the interests of those who converted to Christianity?
3. What objections did the sepoys have to the new cartridges that they were asked to use?
4. How did the last Mughal emperor live the last years of his life?

Let's discuss

***Fig. 17** – Ruins of the Residency in Lucknow*

In June 1857, the rebel forces began the siege of the Residency. A large number of British women, men and children had taken shelter in the buildings there. The rebels surrounded the compound and bombarded the building with shells. Hit by a shell, Henry Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of Awadh, died in one of the rooms that you see in the picture. Notice how buildings carry the marks of past events.

5. What could be the reasons for the confidence of the British rulers about their position in India before May 1857?
6. What impact did Bahadur Shah Zafar's support to the rebellion have on the people and the ruling families?
7. How did the British succeed in securing the submission of the rebel landowners of Awadh?
8. In what ways did the British change their policies as a result of the rebellion of 1857?

Let's do

9. Find out stories and songs remembered by people in your area or your family about San Sattavan ki Ladaai. What memories do people cherish about the great uprising?
10. Find out more about Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. In what ways would she have been an unusual woman for her times?

6 Weavers, Iron Smelters and Factory Owners

Fig. 1 - *Trading ships on the port of Surat in the seventeenth century*
Surat in Gujarat on the west coast of India was one of the most important ports of the Indian Ocean trade. Dutch and English trading ships began using the port from the early seventeenth century. Its importance declined in the eighteenth century.

This chapter tells the story of the crafts and industries of India during British rule by focusing on two industries, namely, textiles and iron and steel. Both these industries were crucial for the industrial revolution in the modern world. Mechanised production of cotton textiles made Britain the foremost industrial nation in the nineteenth century. And when its iron and steel industry started growing from the 1850s, Britain came to be known as the "workshop of the world".

The industrialisation of Britain had a close connection with the conquest and colonisation of India. You have seen (Chapter 2) how the English East India Company's interest in trade led to occupation of territory, and how the pattern of trade changed over the decades. In the late eighteenth century the Company was buying goods in India and exporting them to England and Europe, making profit through this sale. With the growth of industrial production, British industrialists began to see India as a vast market for their industrial products, and over time manufactured goods from Britain began flooding India. How did this affect Indian crafts and industries? This is the question we will explore in this chapter.

Indian Textiles and the World Market

Let us first look at textile production.

Around 1750, before the British conquered Bengal, India was by far the world's largest producer of cotton textiles. Indian textiles had long been renowned both for their fine quality and exquisite craftsmanship. They were extensively traded in Southeast Asia (Java, Sumatra and Penang) and West and Central Asia. From the sixteenth century European trading companies began buying Indian textiles for sale in Europe. Memories of this flourishing trade and the craftsmanship of Indian weavers is preserved in many words still current in English and other languages. It is interesting to trace the origin of such words, and see what they tell us.

Fig. 2 – Patola sarees, mid-nineteenth century

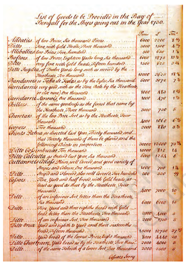
Patola was woven in Surat, Ahmedabad and Patan. Highly valued in Indonesia, it became part of the local wearing tradition there.

Words tell us histories

European traders first encountered fine cotton cloth from India carried by Arab merchants in Mosul in present-day Iraq. So they began referring to all finely woven textiles as "muslin" – a word that acquired wide currency. When the Portuguese first came to India in search of spices they landed in Calicut on the Kerala coast in south-west India. The cotton textiles which they took back to Europe, along with the spices, came to be called "calico" (derived from Calicut), and subsequently calico became the general name for all cotton textiles.

There are many other words which point to the popularity of Indian textiles in Western markets. In Fig. 3 you can see a page of an order book that the English East India Company sent to its representatives in Calcutta in 1730.

The order that year was for 5,80,000 pieces of cloth. Browsing through the order book you would have seen a list of 98 varieties of cotton and silk cloths. These were known by their common name in the European trade as piece goods – usually woven cloth pieces that were 20 yards long and 1 yard wide.



List of Goods to be Provided in the Bay of Bengall for the Ships going out in the Year 1730.

		Pieces	£	Tun
Addaties	of low Prices, Six thousand Pieces	6000	2200	8 4/7
Ditto	Fine, with Gold Heads, Three thousand	3000	1500	4 2/7
Alliballies	low Prices, Five hundred	500	650	1 ¼
Baftaes	of low Prices, Eighteen Yards long, Six thousand	6000	1875	13 ½
Ditto	very fine with Gold heads, Fifteen hundred	1500	625	3 ¾
Ditto Jugdea	of Twelve Yards long such as receiv'd by the Heathcote, Ten thousand	10000	3625	18 ¾
Bandanoes	or Taffa de Foolas, as by the Lyles, Six thousand	6000	3072	7 ½
Carridarries	very good, such as the Fine Bale by the Heathcote (or else none) One thousand	1000	483	1 ⅔
Carridarries	Sannoes, One thousand	1000	470	1 ⅔
Chillaes	of the same goodness as the finest that came by the Heathcote, Three thousand	3000	750	5
Chowtars	of the low Price Sort, as by the Heathcote, Four thousand	4000	1060	6 ⅔
Cooptees	Two thousand	2000	880	3 ⅓
Chints Patna	as directed last Year, Thirty thousand, and that Twenty thousand of them be glazed, and the following Chints in proportion	30000	12000	73 ¾
Ditto Cossimbuzar	Ten thousand	10000	812	14
Ditto Calcutta	as Orderd last Year, Six thousand	6000	1254	6
Cuttannees	Atlass Plain, well Coverd, and good variety of Stripes and Colours, One thousand	1000	700	1 ¼
Ditto	Striped and Flowerd, also well Coverd, Five hundred	500	500	⅝
Cossaes	Fine, Yard and half broad, with Gold heads, at least as good as those by the Heathcote, Four thousand	4000	7000	10
Ditto	of an inferiour Sort, better than the Heathcote, Six thousand	6000	6000	15
Ditto	Fine, Yard and three eighths broad with Gold head, better than the Heathcote, Two thousand	2000	4000	5
Ditto	of an inferiour Sort, Two thousand	2000	3750	5
Ditto Orua	Yard and eighth to Yard and three sixteenths broad, Fifteen thousand	15000	12750	37 ½
Ditto	Yard broad, of the lowest Prices, Eight thousand	8000	4440	20
Ditto Chartpoore	Yard broad as by the Heathcote, Two thous.	2000	4000	5
Ditto	of the same Fabrick of a lower Sort, Two thousand	2000	2500	5

Cossaes Jorry

Fig. 3 – *A page from an order book of the East India Company, 1730*

Notice how each item in the order book was carefully priced in London. These orders had to be placed two years in advance because this was the time required to send orders to India, get the specific cloths woven and shipped to Britain. Once the cloth pieces arrived in London they were put up for auction and sold.

Now look at the names of the different varieties of cloth in the book. Amongst the pieces ordered in bulk were printed cotton cloths called chintz, *cossaes* (or *khassa)* and *bandanna*. Do you know where the English term chintz comes from? It is derived from the Hindi word *chhint*, a cloth with small and colourful flowery designs. From the 1680s there started a craze for printed Indian cotton textiles in England and Europe mainly for their exquisite floral designs, fine texture and relative cheapness. Rich people of England including the Queen herself wore clothes of Indian fabric.

Similarly, the word *bandanna* now refers to any brightly coloured and printed scarf for the neck or head. Originally, the term derived from the word

Fig. 4 – Jamdani *weave, early twentieth century*

Jamdani is a fine muslin on which decorative motifs are woven on the loom, typically in grey and white. Often a mixture of cotton and gold thread was used, as in the cloth in this picture. The most important centres of *jamdani* weaving were Dacca in Bengal and Lucknow in the United Provinces.

Fig. 5 *– Printed design on fine cloth (chintz) produced in Masulipatnam, Andhra Pradesh, mid-nineteenth century*
This is a fine example of the type of chintz produced for export to Iran and Europe.

"*bandhnu*" (Hindi for tying), and referred to a variety of brightly coloured cloth produced through a method of tying and dying.

There were other cloths in the order book that were noted by their place of origin Kasimbazar, Patna, Calcutta, Orissa, Charpoore. The widespread use of such words shows how popular Indian textiles had become in different parts of the world.

Fig. 6 *– Bandanna design, early nineteenth century*
Notice the line that runs through the middle. Do you know why? In this saffron, two tie-and-dye silk pieces are seamed together with gold thread embroidery. Bandanna patterns were mostly produced in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Indian textiles in European markets

By the early eighteenth century, worried by the popularity of Indian textiles, wool and silk makers in England began protesting against the import of Indian cotton textiles. In 1720, the British government enacted a legislation banning the use of printed cotton textiles – chintz – in England. Interestingly, this Act was known as the Calico Act.

At this time textile industries had just begun to develop in England. Unable to compete with Indian textiles, English producers wanted a secure market within the country by preventing the entry of Indian textiles. The first to grow under government protection was the calico printing industry. Indian designs were now imitated and printed in England on white muslin or plain unbleached Indian cloth.

Competition with Indian textiles also led to a search for technological innovation in England. In 1764, the **spinning jenny** was invented by John Kaye which increased the productivity of the traditional spindles. The invention of the steam engine by Richard Arkwright in 1786 revolutionised cotton textile weaving. Cloth could now be woven in immense quantities and cheaply too.

However, Indian textiles continued to dominate world trade till the end of the eighteenth century. European trading companies – the Dutch, the French and the English – made enormous profits out of this flourishing trade. These companies purchased cotton and silk textiles in India by importing silver. But as you know (Chapter 2), when the English East India Company gained political power in Bengal, it no longer had to import precious metal to buy Indian goods. Instead, they collected revenues from peasants and zamindars in India, and used this revenue to buy Indian textiles.

Activity

Why do you think the Act was called the Calico Act? What does the name tell us about the kind of textiles the Act wanted to ban?

Spinning Jenny – A machine by which a single worker could operate several spindles on to which thread was spun. When the wheel was turned all the spindles rotated.

Fig. 7 *– A sea view of the Dutch settlement in Cochin, seventeenth century*

As European trade expanded, trading companies often established at various ports. The Dutch settlements in Cochin came up in the seventeenth century. Notice the fortification around the settlement.

Where were the major centres of weaving in the late eighteenth century?

Fig. 8 *—Weaving centres: 1500–1750*

If you look at the map you will notice that textile production was concentrated in four regions in the early nineteenth century. Bengal was one of the most important centres. Located along the numerous rivers in the delta, the production centres in Bengal could easily transport goods to distant places. Do not forget that in the early nineteenth century railways had not developed and roads were only just beginning to be laid on an extensive scale.

Dacca in Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh) was the foremost textile centre in the eighteenth century. It was famous for its *muslins* and *jamdani* weaving.

If you look at the southern part of India in the map you will see a second cluster of cotton weaving centres along the Coromandel coast stretching from Madras to northern Andhra Pradesh. On the western coast there were important weaving centres in Gujarat.

Who were the weavers?

Weavers often belonged to communities that specialised in weaving. Their skills were passed on from one generation to the next. The *tanti* weavers of Bengal, the *julahas* or *momin* weavers of north India, *sale* and *kaikollar* and *devanga*s of south India are some of the communities famous for weaving.

The first stage of production was spinning – a work done mostly by women. The *charkha* and the *takli* were household spinning instruments. The thread was spun on the *charkha* and rolled on the *takli*. When the spinning was over the thread was woven into cloth by the weaver. In most communities weaving was a task done by men. For coloured textiles, the thread was dyed by the dyer, known as *rangrez*. For printed cloth the weavers needed the help of specialist block printers known as *chhipigars*. Handloom weaving and the occupations associated with it provided livelihood for millions of Indians.

The decline of Indian textiles

The development of cotton industries in Britain affected textile producers in India in several ways. First: Indian textiles now had to compete with British textiles in the European and American markets. Second: exporting textiles to England also became increasingly difficult since very high duties were imposed on Indian textiles imported into Britain.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, English-made cotton textiles successfully ousted Indian goods from their traditional markets in Africa, America and Europe. Thousands of weavers in India were now thrown out of employment. Bengal weavers were the worst hit. English and European companies stopped buying Indian goods and their agents no longer gave out

Fig. 2 *– A tanti weaver of Bengal, painted by the Belgian painter Solvyns in the 1790s*

The *tanti* weaver here is at work in the *pit loom*. Do you know what a pit loom is?

Aurang – A Persian term for a warehouse – a place where goods are collected before being sold; also refers to a workshop

Source 1

"We must starve for food"

In 1823 the Company government in India received a petition from 12,000 weavers stating:

Our ancestors and we used to receive advances from the Company and maintain ourselves and our respective families by weaving Company's superior assortments. Owing to our misfortune, the **aurangs** have been abolished ever since because of which we and our families are distressed for want of the means of livelihood. We are weavers and do not know any other business. We must starve for food, if the Board of Trade do not cast a look of kindness towards us and give orders for clothes.

Proceedings of the Board of Trade, 9 February 1824

Source 2

"Please publish this in your paper"

One widowed spinner wrote in 1828 to a Bengali newspaper, *Samachar Darpan*, detailing her plight:

To the Editor, Samachar,

I am a spinner. After having suffered a great deal, I am writing this letter. Please publish this in your paper ... When my age was ... 22, I became a widow with three daughters. My husband left nothing at the time of his death. ... I sold my jewellery for his shraddha ceremony. When we were on the verge of starvation God showed me a way by which we could save ourselves. I began to spin on takli and *charkha* ...

The weavers used to visit our houses and buy the *charkha* yarn at three tolas per rupee. Whatever amount I wanted as advance from the weavers, I could get for the asking. This saved us from cares about food and cloth. In a few years' time I got together ... Rs. 28. With this I married one daughter. And in the same way all three daughters ...

Now for 3 years, we two women, mother-in-law and me, are in want of food. The weavers do not call at the house for buying yarn. Not only this, if the yarn is sent to market it is still not sold even at one-fourth the old prices.

I do not know how it happened. I asked many about it. They say that Bilati 2 yarn is being imported on a large scale. The weavers buy that yarn and weave ... People cannot use the cloth out of this yarn even for two months, it rots easily.

A representation from a suffering spinner

advances to weavers to secure supplies. Distressed weavers wrote petitions to the government to help them.

But worse was still to come. By the 1830s British cotton cloth flooded Indian markets. In fact, by the 1880s two-thirds of all the cotton clothes worn by Indians were made of cloth produced in Britain. This affected not only specialist weavers but also spinners. Thousands of rural women who made a living by spinning cotton thread were rendered jobless.

Handloom weaving did not completely die in India. This was because some types of cloths could not be supplied by machines. How could machines produce saris with intricate borders or cloths with traditional woven patterns? These had a wide demand not only amongst the rich but also amongst the middle classes. Nor did the textile manufacturers in Britain produce the very coarse cloths used by the poor people in India.

Activity

Read Sources 1 and 2. What reasons do the petition writers give for their condition of starvation?

You must have heard of Sholapur in western India and Madura in South India. These towns emerged as important new centres of weaving in the late nineteenth century. Later, during the national movement, Mahatma Gandhi urged people to boycott imported textiles and use hand-spun and hand-woven cloth. *Khadi* gradually became a symbol of nationalism. The *charkha* came to represent India, and it was put at the centre of the tricolour flag of the Indian National Congress adopted in 1931.

What happened to the weavers and spinners who lost their livelihood? Many weavers became agricultural labourers. Some migrated to cities in search of work, and yet others went out of the country to work in plantations in Africa and South America. Some of these handloom weavers also found work in the new cotton mills that were established in Bombay (now Mumbai), Ahmedabad, Sholapur, Nagpur and Kanpur.

Cotton mills come up

The first cotton mill in India was set up as a spinning mill in Bombay in 1854. From the early nineteenth century, Bombay had grown as an important port for the export of raw cotton from India to England and China. It was close to the vast black soil tract of western India where cotton was grown. When the cotton textile mills came up they could get supplies of raw material with ease.

Fig. 10 – *Workers in a cotton factory, circa 1900, photograph by Raja Deen Dayal*
Most workers in the spinning departments were women, while workers in the weaving departments were mostly men.

Smelting – The process of obtaining a metal from rock (or soil) by heating it to a very high temperature, or of melting objects made from metal in order to use the metal to make something new

Fig. 11 *Tipu's sword made in the late-eighteenth century*
Written with gold on the steel handle of Tipu's sword were quotations from the Koran with messages about victories in war. Notice the tiger head towards the bottom of the handle.

By 1900, over 84 mills started operating in Bombay. Many of these were established by Parsi and Gujarati businessmen who had made their money through trade with China.

Mills came up in other cities too. The first mill in Ahmedabad was started in 1861. A year later a mill was established in Kanpur, in the United Provinces. Growth of cotton mills led to a demand for labour. Thousands of poor peasants, artisans and agricultural labourers moved to the cities to work in the mills.

In the first few decades of its existence, the textile factory industry in India faced many problems. It found it difficult to compete with the cheap textiles imported from Britain. In most countries, governments supported industrialisation by imposing heavy duties on imports. This eliminated competition and protected infant industries. The colonial government in India usually refused such protection to local industries. The first major spurt in the development of cotton factory production in India, therefore, was during the First World War when textile imports from Britain declined and Indian factories were called upon to produce cloth for military supplies.

The sword of Tipu Sultan and Wootz steel

We begin the story of Indian steel and iron metallurgy by recounting the famous story of Tipu Sultan who ruled Mysore till 1799, fought four wars with the British and died fighting with his sword in his hand. Tipu's legendary swords are now part of valuable collections in museums in England. But do you know why the sword was so special? The sword had an incredibly hard and sharp edge that could easily rip through the opponent's armour. This quality of the sword came from a special type of high carbon steel called Wootz which was produced all over south India. Wootz steel when made into swords produced a very sharp edge with a flowing water pattern. This pattern came from very small carbon crystals embedded in the iron.

Francis Buchanan who toured through Mysore in 1800, a year after Tipu Sultan's death, has left us an account of the technique by which Wootz steel was produced in many hundreds of **smelting** furnaces in Mysore. In these furnaces, iron was mixed with charcoal and put inside small clay pots. Through an intricate control of temperatures the smelters produced steel ingots that were used for sword making not just in India but in West and Central Asia too. Wootz is an anglicised

version of the Kannada word *ukku*, Telugu *bukku* and Tamil and Malayalam *urukku* – meaning steel.

Indian Wootz steel fascinated European scientists. Michael Faraday, the legendary scientist and discoverer of electricity and electromagnetism, spent four years studying the properties of Indian Wootz (1818-22). However, the Wootz steel making process, which was so widely known in south India, was completely lost by the mid-nineteenth century. Can you guess why this was so? The swords and armour making industry died with the conquest of India by the British and imports of iron and steel from England displaced the iron and steel produced by craftspeople in India.

Activity

Why would the iron and steel making industry be affected by the defeat of the nawabs and rajas?

Abandoned furnaces in villages

Production of Wootz steel required a highly specialised technique of refining iron. But iron smelting in India was extremely common till the end of the nineteenth century. In Bihar and Central India, in particular, every district had smelters that used local deposits of ore to produce iron which was widely used for the manufacture of implements and tools of daily use. The furnaces were most often built of clay and sun-dried bricks. The smelting was done by men while women worked the **bellows**, pumping air that kept the charcoal burning.

Bellows – A device or equipment that can pump air.

Fig. 12 - *Iron smelters of Pakmara, Bihar*

Fig. 13 *– A village in Central India where the Agarias – a community of iron smelters – lived.*

Some communities like the Agarias specialised in the craft of iron smelting. In the late nineteenth century, a series of famines devastated the dry zone of India. In Central India, many of the Agaria iron smelters stopped work, deserted their villages and migrated, looking for some other work to survive the hard times. A large number of them never worked their furnaces again.

Source 3

A widespread industry

According to a report of the Geological Survey of India:

> Iron smelting was at one time a widespread industry in India and there is hardly a district away from the great alluvial tracts of the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra, in which **slag heaps** are not found. For the primitive iron smelter finds no difficulty in obtaining sufficient supplies of ore from deposits that no European ironmaster would regard as worth his serious consideration.

By the late nineteenth century, however, the craft of iron smelting was in decline. In most villages, furnaces fell into disuse and the amount of iron produced came down. Why was this so?

One reason was the new forest laws that you have read about (Chapter 4). When the colonial government prevented people from entering the reserved forests, how could the iron smelters find wood for charcoal? Where could they get iron ore? Defying forest laws, they often entered the forests secretly and collected wood, but they could not sustain their occupation on this basis for long. Many gave up their craft and looked for other means of livelihood.

In some areas the government did grant access to the forest. But the iron smelters had to pay a very high tax to the forest department for every furnace they used. This reduced their income.

Moreover, by the late nineteenth century iron and steel was being imported from Britain. Ironsmiths in India began using the imported iron to manufacture utensils and implements. This inevitably lowered the demand for iron produced by local smelters.

By the early twentieth century, the artisans producing iron and steel faced a new competition.

Iron and steel factories come up in India

Slag heaps – The waste left when smelting metal

The year was 1904. In the hot month of April, Charles Weld, an American geologist and Dorabji Tata, the eldest son of Jamsetji Tata, were travelling in Chhattisgarh in search of iron ore deposits. They had spent many months on a costly venture looking for sources of good iron ore to set up a modern iron and steel plant in India. Jamsetji Tata had decided to spend a large part of his fortune to build a big iron and steel industry in India. But this could not be done without identifying the source of fine quality iron ore.

One day, after travelling for many hours in the forests, Weld and Dorabji came upon a small village and found a group of men and women carrying basketloads of iron ore. These people were the Agarias. When asked where they had found the iron ore, the Agarias pointed to a hill in the distance. Weld and Dorabji reached the hill after an exhausting trek through dense forests. On exploring the hill the geologist declared that they had at last found what they had been looking for. Rajhara Hills had one of the finest ores in the world.

But there was a problem. The region was dry and water – necessary for running the factory – was just to be found nearby. The Tatas had to continue their search for a more suitable place to set up their factory. However, the Agarias helped in the discovery of a source of iron ore that would later supply the Bhilai Steel Plant.

A few years later a large area of forest was cleared on the banks of the river Subarnarekha to set up the factory and an industrial township – Jamshedpur. Here there was water near iron ore deposits. The Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) that came up began producing steel in 1912.

TISCO was set up at an opportune time. All through the late nineteenth century, India was importing steel that was manufactured in Britain. Expansion of the railways in India

***Fig. 14** – The Tata Iron and Steel factory on the banks of the river Subarnarekha, 1940*

had provided a huge market for rails that Britain produced. For a long while, British experts in the Indian Railways were unwilling to believe that good quality steel could be produced in India.

By the time TISCO was set up the situation was changing. In 1914 the First World War broke out. Steel produced in Britain now had to meet the demands of war in Europe. So imports of British steel into India declined dramatically and the Indian Railways turned to TISCO for supply of rails. As the war dragged on for several years, TISCO had to produce shells and carriage wheels for the war. By 1919 the colonial government was buying 90 per cent of the steel manufactured by TISCO. Over time TISCO became the biggest steel industry within the British empire.

In the case of iron and steel, as in the case of cotton textiles, industrial expansion occurred only when British imports into India declined and the market for Indian

Fig. 15 – *Expansion at the end of the war*
To meet the demands of the war, TISCO had to expand its capacity and extend the size of its factory. The programme of expansion continued after the war. Here you see new powerhouses and boiler houses being built in Jamshedpur in 1918.

industrial goods increased. This happened during the First World War and after. As the nationalist movement developed and the industrial class became stronger, the demand for government protection became louder. Struggling to retain its control over India, the British government had to concede many of these demands in the last decades of colonial rule.

ELSEWHERE

Early years of industrialisation in Japan

The history of industrialisation of Japan in the late nineteenth century presents a contrast to that of India. The colonial state in India, keen to expand the market for British goods, was unwilling to support Indian industrialists. In Japan, the state encouraged the growth of industries.

The Meiji regime, which assumed power in Japan in 1868, believed that Japan needed to industrialise in order to resist Western domination. So it initiated a series of measures to help industrialisation. Postal services, telegraph, railways, steam powered shipping were developed. The most advanced technology from the West was imported and adapted to the needs of Japan. Foreign experts were brought to train Japanese professionals. Industrialists were provided with generous loans for investment by banks set up the government. Large industries were first started by the government and then sold off at cheap rates to business families.

In India colonial domination created barriers to industrialisation. In Japan the fear of foreign conquest ignited industrialisation. But this also meant that the Japanese industrial development from the beginning was linked to military needs.

Let's recall

1. What kinds of cloth had a large market in Europe?
2. What is *jamdani*?
3. What is *bandanna*?
4. Who are the Agaria?

Let's imagine

Imagine you are a textile weaver in late-nineteenth-century India. Textiles produced in Indian factories are flooding the market. How would you have adjusted to the situation?

5. Fill in the blanks:

   (a) The word chintz comes from the word _____.

   (b) Tipu's sword was made of_____ steel.

   (c) India's textile exports declined in the _____ century.

Let's Discuss

6. How do the names of different textiles tell us about their histories?
7. Why did the wool and silk producers in England protest against the import of Indian textiles in the early eighteenth century?
8. How did the development of cotton industries in Britain affect textile producers in India?
9. Why did the Indian iron smelting industry decline in the nineteenth century?
10. What problems did the Indian textile industry face in the early years of its development?
11. What helped TISCO expand steel production during the First World War?

Let's Do

12. Find out about the history of any craft around the area you live. You may wish to know about the community of craftsmen, the changes in the techniques they use and the markets they supply. How have these changed in the past 50 years?
13. On a map of India, locate the centres of different crafts today. Find out when these centres came up.

7 Civilising the "Native", Educating the Nation

In the earlier chapters you have seen how British rule affected rajas and nawabs, peasants and tribals. In this chapter we will try and understand what implication it had for the lives of students. For, the British in India wanted not only territorial conquest and control over revenues. They also felt that they had a cultural mission: they had to 'civilise the natives', change their customs and values.

What changes were to be introduced? How were Indians to be educated, "civilised", and made into what the British believed were "good subjects"? The British could find no simple answers to these questions. They continued to be debated for many decades.

Linguist – Someone who knows and studies several languages

How the British saw Education

Let us look at what the British thought and did, and how some of the ideas of education that we now take for granted evolved in the last two hundred years. In the process of this enquiry we will also see how Indians reacted to British ideas, and how they developed their own views about how Indians were to be educated.

The tradition of Orientalism

In 1783, a person named William Jones arrived in Calcutta. He had an appointment as a junior judge at the Supreme Court that the Company had set up. In addition to being an expert in law, Jones was a **linguist**. He had studied Greek and Latin at Oxford, knew French and English, had picked up Arabic from a friend, and had also learnt Persian. At Calcutta, he began spending many hours a day with pandits who taught him the subtleties of Sanskrit language, grammar and

Fig. 1 – William Jones learning Persian

Fig. 2 – Henry Thomas Colebrooke
He was a scholar of Sanskrit and ancient sacred writings of Hindusism.

poetry. Soon he was studying ancient Indian texts on law, philosophy, religion, politics, morality, arithmetic, medicine and the other sciences.

Jones discovered that his interests were shared by many British officials living in Calcutta at the time. Englishmen like Henry Thomas Colebrooke and Nathaniel Halhed were also busy discovering the ancient Indian heritage, mastering Indian languages and translating Sanskrit and Persian works into English. Together with them, Jones set up the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and started a journal called *Asiatick Researches*.

Jones and Colebrooke came to represent a particular attitude towards India. They shared a deep respect for ancient cultures, both of India and the West. Indian civilisation, they felt, had attained its glory in the ancient past, but had subsequently declined. In order to understand India it was necessary to discover the sacred and legal texts that were produced in the ancient period. For only those texts could reveal the real ideas and laws of the Hindus and Muslims, and only a new study of these texts could form the basis of future development in India.

So Jones and Colebrooke went about discovering ancient texts, understanding their meaning, translating them, and making their findings known to others. This project, they believed, would not only help the British learn from Indian culture, but it would also help Indians rediscover their own heritage, and understand the lost glories of their past. In this process the British would become the guardians of Indian culture as well as its masters.

Influenced by such ideas, many Company officials argued that the British ought to promote Indian rather than Western learning. They felt that institutions should be set up to encourage the study of ancient Indian texts and teach Sanskrit and Persian literature and poetry. The officials also thought that Hindus and Muslims ought to be taught what they were already familiar with, and what they valued and treasured, not subjects that were alien to them. Only then, they believed, could the British hope to win a place in the hearts of the "natives"; only then could the alien rulers expect to be respected by their subjects.

With this object in view a **madrasa** was set up in Calcutta in 1781 to promote the study of Arabic, Persian and Islamic law; and the Hindu College was established in Benaras in 1791 to encourage the study of ancient Sanskrit texts that would be useful for the administration of the country.

Madrasa – An Arabic word for a place of learning; any type of school or college

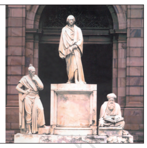


Fig. 3 *– Monument to Warren Hastings, by Richard Westmacott, 1830, now in Victoria Memorial in Calcutta*

This image represents how **Orientalists** thought of British power in India. You will notice that the majestic figure of Hastings, an enthusiastic supporter of the Orientalists, is placed between the standing figure of a pandit on one side and a seated **munshi** on the other side. Hastings and other Orientalists needed Indian scholars to teach them the **"vernacular"** languages, tell them about local customs and laws, and help them translate and interpret ancient texts. Hastings took the initiative to set up the Calcutta Madrasa, and believed that the ancient customs of the country and Oriental learning ought to be the basis of British rule in India.

Not all officials shared these views. Many were very strong in their criticism of the Orientalists.

"Grave errors of the East"

From the early nineteenth century many British officials began to criticise the Orientalist vision of learning. They said that knowledge of the East was full of errors and unscientific thought; Eastern literature was non-serious and light-hearted. So they argued that it was wrong on the part of the British to spend so much effort in encouraging the study of Arabic and Sanskrit language and literature.

James Mill was one of those who attacked the Orientalists. The British effort, he declared, should not be to teach what the natives wanted, or what they respected, in order to please them and "win a place in their heart". The aim of education ought to be to teach what was useful and practical. So Indians should be made familiar with the scientific and technical advances that the West had made, rather than with the poetry and sacred literature of the Orient.

By the 1830s the attack on the Orientalists became sharper. One of the most outspoken and influential of such critics of the time was Thomas Babington Macaulay. He saw India as an uncivilised country that needed to be civilised. No branch of Eastern knowledge, according to him could be compared to what England had produced. Who could deny, declared Macaulay, that

Orientalists – Those with a scholarly knowledge of the language and culture of Asia

Munshi – A person who can read, write and teach Persian

Vernacular – A term generally used to refer to a local language or dialect as distinct from what is seen as the standard language. In colonial countries like India, the British used the term to mark the difference between the local languages of everyday use and English – the language of the imperial masters.

Fig. 4 Thomas Babington Macaulay in his study

Source 1

Language of the wise?

Emphasising the need to teach English, Macaulay declared:

> All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives ... of India, contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them ...
>
> *From Thomas Babington Macaulay, Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education*

"a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia". He urged that the British government in India stop wasting public money in promoting Oriental learning, for it was of no practical use.

With great energy and passion, Macaulay emphasised the need to teach the English language. He felt that knowledge of English would allow Indians to read some of the finest literature the world had produced; it would make them aware of the developments in Western science and philosophy. Teaching of English could thus be a way of civilising people, changing their tastes, values and culture.

Following Macaulay's minute, the English Education Act of 1835 was introduced. The decision was to make English the medium of instruction for higher education, and to stop the promotion of Oriental institutions like the Calcutta Madrasa and Benaras Sanskrit College. These institutions were seen as "temples of darkness that were falling of themselves into decay". English textbooks now began to be produced for schools.

Education for commerce

In 1854, the Court of Directors of the East India Company in London sent an educational despatch to the Governor-General in India. Issued by Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the Company, it has come to be known as Wood's Despatch. Outlining the educational policy that was to be followed in India, it emphasised once again the practical benefits of a system of European learning, as opposed to Oriental knowledge.

One of the practical uses the Despatch pointed to was economic. European learning, it said, would enable Indians to recognise the advantages that flow from the expansion of trade and commerce, and make them see the importance of developing the resources of the country. Introducing them to European ways of life, would change their tastes and desires, and create a demand for British goods, for Indians would begin to appreciate and buy things that were produced in Europe.

Wood's Despatch also argued that European learning would improve the moral character of Indians. It would make them truthful and honest, and thus supply the Company with civil servants who could be trusted and depended upon. The literature of the East was not only full of grave errors, it could also not instill in people a sense of duty and a commitment to work, nor could it develop the skills required for administration.

Following the 1854 Despatch, several measures were introduced by the British. Education departments of the government were set up to extend control over all matters regarding education. Steps were taken to establish a system of university education. In 1857, while the sepoys rose in revolt in Meerut and Delhi, universities were being established in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Attempts were also made to bring about changes within the system of school education.

Activity

Imagine you are living in the 1850s. You hear of Wood's Despatch. Write about your reactions.

Source 2

An argument for European knowledge

Wood's Despatch of 1854 marked the final triumph of those who opposed Oriental learning. It stated:

> We must emphatically declare that the education which we desire to see extended in India is that which has for its object the diffusion of the improved arts, sciences, philosophy, and literature of Europe, in short, European knowledge.

Fig. 5 – *Bombay University in the nineteenth century*

The demand for moral education

Fig. 6 - *William Carey was a Baptist missionary who helped establish the Serampore Mission*

The argument for practical education was strongly criticised by the Christian missionaries in India in the nineteenth century. The missionaries felt that education should attempt to improve the moral character of the people, and morality could be improved only through Christian education.

Until 1813, the East India Company was opposed to missionary activities in India. It feared that missionary activities would provoke reaction amongst the local population and make them suspicious of British presence in India. Unable to establish an institution within British-controlled territories, the missionaries set up a mission at Serampore in an area under the control of the Danish East India Company. A printing press was set up in 1800 and a college established in 1818.

Over the nineteenth century, missionary schools were set up all over India. After 1857, however, the British government in India was reluctant to directly support missionary education. There was a feeling that any strong attack on local customs, practices, beliefs and religious ideas might enrage "native" opinion.

Fig. 7 - *Serampore College on the banks of the river Hooghly near Calcutta*

What Happened to the Local Schools?

Do you have any idea of how children were taught in pre-British times? Have you ever wondered whether they went to schools? And if there were schools, what happened to these under British rule?

The report of William Adam

In the 1830s, William Adam, a Scottish missionary, toured the districts of Bengal and Bihar. He had been asked by the Company to report on the progress of education in vernacular schools. The report Adam produced is interesting.

Adam found that there were over 1 lakh *pathshalas* in Bengal and Bihar. These were small institutions with no more than 20 students each. But the total number of children being taught in these *pathshalas* was considerable – over 20 lakh. These institutions were set up by wealthy people, or the local community. At times they were started by a teacher (*guru*).

The system of education was flexible. Few things that you associate with schools today were present in the *pathshalas* at the time. There were no fixed fee, no printed books, no separate school building, no benches or chairs, no blackboards, no system of separate classes, no roll-call registers, no annual examinations, and no regular time-table. In some places classes were held under a banyan tree, in other places in the corner of a village shop or temple, or at the *guru's* home. Fee depended on the income of parents: the rich had to pay more than the poor. Teaching was oral, and the *guru* decided what to teach, in accordance with the needs of the students. Students were not separated out into different classes: all of them sat together in one place. The *guru* interacted separately with groups of children with different levels of learning.

Adam discovered that this flexible system was suited to local needs. For instance, classes were not held during harvest time when rural children often worked in the fields. The *pathshala* started once again when the crops had been cut and stored. This meant that even children of peasant families could study.

Fig. 2 *– A village pathshala*
This is a painting by a Dutch painter, Francois Balthyn, who came to India in the late eighteenth century. He tried to depict the everyday life of people in his paintings.

Activity

1. Imagine you were born in a poor family in the 1850s. How would you have responded to the coming of the new system of government-regulated *pathshalas*?
2. Did you know that about 50 per cent of the children going to primary school drop out of school by the time they are 13 or 14? Can you think of the various possible reasons for this fact?

Fig. 9 *– Sri Aurobindo Ghose*

In a speech delivered on January 15, 1908 in Bombay, Aurobindo Ghose stated that the purpose of education was to awaken the spirit of nationality among the students. This required a contemplation of the heroic deeds of our ancestors. The education should be imparted in the vernacular so as to reach the largest number of people. Aurobindo Ghose emphasised that although the students should be deeply connected to their own roots, they should also take the fullest advantage of modern scientific discoveries and Western experiments in popular governments. Moreover, the students should also learn some useful crafts so that they could be able to find some decently remunerative employment after leaving their schools.

New routines, new rules

Up to the mid-nineteenth century, the Company was concerned primarily with higher education. So it allowed the local *pathshalas* to function without much interference. After 1854 the Company decided to improve the system of vernacular education. It felt that this could be done by introducing order within the system, imposing routines, establishing rules, ensuring regular inspections.

How was this to be done? What measures did the Company undertake? It appointed a number of government pandits, each in charge of looking after four to five schools. The task of the pandit was to visit the *pathshalas* and try and improve the standard of teaching. Each *guru* was asked to submit periodic reports and take classes according to a regular timetable. Teaching was now to be based on textbooks and learning was to be tested through a system of annual examination. Students were asked to pay a regular fee, attend regular classes, sit on fixed seats, and obey the new rules of discipline.

Pathshalas which accepted the new rules were supported through government grants. Those who were unwilling to work within the new system received no government support. Over time *gurus* who wanted to retain their independence found it difficult to compete with the government aided and regulated *pathshalas*.

The new rules and routines had another consequence. In the earlier system children from poor peasant families had been able to go to *pathshalas*, since the timetable was flexible. The discipline of the new system demanded regular attendance, even during harvest time when children of poor families had to work in the fields. Inability to attend school came to be seen as indiscipline, as evidence of the lack of desire to learn.

The Agenda for a National Education

British officials were not the only people thinking about education in India. From the early nineteenth century many thinkers from different parts of India began to talk of the need for a wider spread of education. Impressed with the developments in Europe, some Indians felt that Western education would help modernise India. They urged the British to open more schools, colleges and universities, and spend more money on education. You will read about some of these efforts in

Chapter 9. There were other Indians, however, who reacted against Western education. Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were two such individuals.

Let us look at what they had to say.

"English education has enslaved us"

Mahatma Gandhi argued that colonial education created a sense of inferiority in the minds of Indians. It made them see Western civilisation as superior, and destroyed the pride they had in their own culture. There was poison in this education, said Mahatma Gandhi, it was sinful, it enslaved Indians, it cast an evil spell on them. Charmed by the West, appreciating everything that came from the West, Indians educated in these institutions began admiring British rule. Mahatma Gandhi wanted an education that could help Indians recover their sense of dignity and self-respect. During the national movement he urged students to leave educational institutions in order to show to the British that Indians were no longer willing to be enslaved.

Mahatma Gandhi strongly felt that Indian languages ought to be the medium of teaching. Education in English crippled Indians, distanced them from their own social surroundings, and made them 'strangers in their own lands'. Speaking a foreign tongue, despising local culture, the English educated did not know how to relate to the masses.

Western education, Mahatma Gandhi said, focused on reading and writing rather than oral knowledge; it valued textbooks rather than lived experience and practical knowledge. He argued that education ought to develop a person's mind and soul. Literacy – or simply learning to read and write – by itself did not count as education. People had to work with their hands, learn a craft, and know how different things operated. This would develop their mind and their capacity to understand.

Fig. 10 - *Mahatma Gandhi along with Kasturba Gandhi sitting with Rabindranath Tagore and a group of girls at Santiniketan, 1940*

Source 2

"Literacy in itself is not education"

Mahatma Gandhi wrote:

> By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is not education. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training ... I hold that the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education. Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today, but scientifically, i.e., the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process.

The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 72, p. 78

As nationalist sentiments spread, other thinkers also began thinking of a system of national education which would be radically different from that set up by the British.

Tagore's "abode of peace"

Many of you may have heard of Santiniketan. Do you know why it was established and by whom?

Rabindranath Tagore started the institution in 1901. As a child, Tagore hated going to school. He found it suffocating and oppressive. The school appeared like a prison, for he could never do what he felt like doing. So while other children listened to the teacher, Tagore's mind would wander away.

The experience of his schooldays in Calcutta shaped Tagore's ideas of education. On growing up, he wanted to set up a school where the child was happy, where she could be free and creative, where she was able to explore her own thoughts and desires. Tagore felt

Fig. 11 – *A class in progress in Santiniketan in the 1930s*
Notice the surroundings – the trees and the open spaces.

that childhood ought to be a time of self-learning, outside the rigid and restricting discipline of the schooling system set up by the British. Teachers had to be imaginative, understand the child, and help the child develop her curiosity. According to Tagore, the existing schools killed the natural desire of the child to be creative, her sense of wonder.

Tagore was of the view that creative learning could be encouraged only within a natural environment. So he chose to set up his school 100 kilometres away from Calcutta, in a rural setting. He saw it as an abode of peace (*santiniketan*), where living in harmony with nature, children could cultivate their natural creativity.

In many senses Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi thought about education in similar ways. There were, however, differences too. Gandhiji was highly critical of Western civilisation and its worship of machines and technology. Tagore wanted to combine elements of modern Western civilisation with what he saw as the best within Indian tradition. He emphasised the need to teach science and technology at Santiniketan, along with art, music and dance.

Many individuals and thinkers were thus thinking about the way a national educational system could be fashioned. Some wanted changes within the system set up by the British, and felt that the system could be extended so as to include wider sections of people. Others urged that alternative systems be created so that people were educated into a culture that was truly national. Who was to define what was truly national? The debate about what this "national education" ought to be continued till after independence.

Fig. 13 *–Children playing* In a missionary school in Coimbatore, early twentieth century.
By the mid-nineteenth century, schools for girls were being set up by Christian missionaries and Indian reform organisations.

ELSEWHERE

Education as a civilising mission

Until the introduction of the Education Act in 1870, there was no widespread education for the population as a whole for most of the nineteenth century. Child labour being widely prevalent, poor children could not be sent to school for their earning was critical for the survival of the family. The number of schools was also limited to those run by the Church or set up by wealthy individuals. It was only after the coming into force of the Education Act that schools were opened by the government and compulsory schooling was introduced.

One of the most important educational thinkers of the period was Thomas Arnold, who became the headmaster of the private school Rugby. Favouring a secondary school curriculum which had a detailed study of the Greek and Roman classics, written 2,000 years earlier, he said:

> It has always seemed to me one of the great advantages of the course of study generally pursued in our English schools that it draws our minds so continually to dwell upon the past. Every day we are engaged in studying the languages, the history, and the thoughts of men who lived nearly or more than two thousand years ago…

Arnold felt that a study of the classics disciplined the mind. In fact, most educators of the time believed that such a discipline was necessary because young people were naturally savage and needed to be controlled. To become civilised adults, they needed to understand society's notions of right and wrong, proper and improper behaviour. Education, especially one which disciplined their minds, was meant to guide them on this path.

Can you suggest how such ideas might have influenced thinking about education of the poor in England and of the "natives" in the colonies?

Let's imagine

Imagine you were witness to a debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Macaulay on English education. Write a page on the dialogue you heard.

Let's recall

1. Match the following:

William Jones	promotion of English education
Rabindranath Tagore	respect for ancient cultures
Thomas Macaulay	*gurus*
Mahatma Gandhi	learning in a natural environment
Pathshalas	critical of English education

2. State whether true or false:

   (a) James Mill was a severe critic of the Orientalists.

   (b) The 1854 Despatch on education was in favour of English being introduced as a medium of higher education in India.

   (c) Mahatma Gandhi thought that promotion of literacy was the most important aim of education.

   (d) Rabindranath Tagore felt that children ought to be subjected to strict discipline.

Let's Discuss

3. Why did William Jones feel the need to study Indian history, philosophy and law?
4. Why did James Mill and Thomas Macaulay think that European education was essential in India?
5. Why did Mahatma Gandhi want to teach children handicrafts?
6. Why did Mahatma Gandhi think that English education had enslaved Indians?

Let's Do

7. Find out from your grandparents about what they studied in school.
8. Find out about the history of your school or any other school in the area you live.

8 Women, Caste and Reform

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Have you ever thought of how children lived about two hundred years ago? Nowadays most girls from middle-class families go to school, and often study with boys. On growing up, many of them go to colleges and universities, and take up jobs after that. They have to be adults before they are legally married, and according to law, they can marry anyone they like, from any caste and community, and widows can remarry too. All women, like all men, can vote and stand for elections. Of course, these rights are not actually enjoyed by all. Poor people have little or no access to education, and in many families, women cannot choose their husbands.

Fig. 1 *– Sati, painted by Balthazar Solvyn, 1813*

This was one of the many pictures of sati painted by the European artists who came to India. The practice of sati was seen as evidence of the barbarism of the East.

Two hundred years ago things were very different. Most children were married off at an early age. Both Hindu and Muslim men could marry more than one wife. In some parts of the country, widows were praised if they chose death by burning themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands. Women who died in this manner, whether willingly or otherwise, were called "sati", meaning virtuous women. Women's rights to property were also restricted. Besides, most women had virtually no access to education. In many parts of the country people believed that if a woman was educated, she would become a widow.

Differences between men and women were not the only ones in society. In most regions, people were divided along lines of caste. Brahmans and Kshatriyas considered themselves as "upper castes". Others, such as traders and moneylenders (often referred to as Vaishyas) were placed after them. Then came peasants, and artisans such as weavers and potters (referred to as Shudras). At the lowest rung were those who laboured to keep cities and villages clean or worked at jobs that upper castes considered "polluting", that is, it could lead to the loss of caste status. The upper castes also treated many of these groups at the bottom as "untouchable". They were not allowed to enter temples, draw water from the wells used by the upper castes, or bathe in ponds where upper castes bathed. They were seen as inferior human beings.

Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many of these norms and perceptions slowly changed. Let us see how this happened.

Working Towards Change

From the early nineteenth century, we find debates and discussions about social customs and practices taking on a new character. One important reason for this was the development of new forms of communication. For the first time, books, newspapers, magazines, leaflets and pamphlets were printed. These were far cheaper and far more accessible than the manuscripts that you have read about in Class VII. Therefore ordinary people could read these, and many of them could also write and express their ideas in their own languages. All kinds of issues – social, political, economic and religious – could now be debated and discussed by men (and sometimes by women as well) in the new cities. The discussions could reach out to a wider public, and could become linked to movements for social change.

These debates were often initiated by Indian reformers and reform groups. One such reformer was Raja Rammohun Roy (1772–1833). He founded a reform association known as the Brahmo Sabha (later known as the Brahmo Samaj) in Calcutta. People such as Rammohun Roy are described as reformers because they felt that changes were necessary in society, and unjust practices needed to be done away with. They thought that the best way to ensure such changes was by persuading people to give up old practices and adopt a new way of life.

Activity

Can you think of the ways in which social customs and practices were discussed in the pre-printing age when books, newspapers and pamphlets were not readily available?

Fig. 2 *– Raja Rammohun Roy, painted by Rembrandt Peale, 1833*

Rammohun Roy was keen to spread the knowledge of Western education in the country and bring about greater freedom and equality for women. He wrote about the way women were forced to bear the burden of domestic work, confined to the home and the kitchen, and not allowed to move out and become educated.

Changing the lives of widows

Rammohun Roy was particularly moved by the problems widows faced in their lives. He began a campaign against the practice of sati.

Rammohun Roy was well versed in Sanskrit, Persian and several other Indian and European languages. He tried to show through his writings that the practice of widow burning had no sanction in ancient texts. By the early nineteenth century, as you have read in Chapter 7, many British officials had also begun to criticise Indian traditions and customs. They were therefore more than willing to listen to Rammohun who was reputed to be a learned man. In 1829, sati was banned.

The strategy adopted by Rammohun was used by later reformers as well. Whenever they wished to challenge a practice that seemed harmful, they tried to find a verse or sentence in the ancient sacred texts that supported their point of view. They then suggested that the practice as it existed at present was against early tradition.

Fig. 3 *– Hook swinging festival*

In this popular festival, devotees underwent a peculiar form of suffering as part of ritual worship. With hooks pierced through their skin they swung themselves on a wheel. In the nineteenth century, when European officials began criticising Indian customs and rituals as barbaric, this was one of the rituals that came under attack.

Source 1

"We first tie them down to the pile"

Rammohun Roy published many pamphlets to spread his ideas. Some of these were written as a dialogue between the advocate and critic of a traditional practice. Here is one such dialogue on sati:

ADVOCATE OF SATI:

Women are by nature of inferior understanding, without resolution, unworthy of trust ... Many of them, on the death of their husbands, become desirous of accompanying them; but to remove every chance of their trying to escape from the blazing fire, in burning them we first tie them down to the pile.

OPPONENT OF SATI:

When did you ever afford them a fair opportunity of exhibiting their natural capacity? How then can you accuse them of want of understanding? If, after instruction in knowledge and wisdom, a person cannot comprehend or retain what has been taught him, we may consider him as deficient; but if you do not educate women how can you see them as inferior.

Activity

This argument was taking place more than 175 years ago. Write down the different arguments you may have heard around you on the worth of women. In what ways have the views changed?

For instance, one of the most famous reformers, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, used the ancient texts to suggest that widows could remarry. His suggestion was adopted by British officials, and a law was passed in 1856 permitting widow remarriage. Those who were against the remarriage of widows opposed Vidyasagar, and even boycotted him.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the movement in favour of widow remarriage spread to other parts of the country. In the Telugu-speaking areas of the Madras Presidency, Veerasalingam Pantulu formed an association for widow remarriage. Around the same time young intellectuals and reformers in Bombay pledged themselves to working for the same cause. In the north, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who founded the reform association called Arya Samaj, also supported widow remarriage.

Yet, the number of widows who actually remarried remained low. Those who married were not easily accepted in society and conservative groups continued to oppose the new law.

***Fig. 4** – Swami Dayanand Saraswati*

Dayanand founded the Arya Samaj in 1875, an organisation that attempted to reform Hinduism.

Fig. 5
Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar

Fig. 6 – Students *of Hindu* Mahila Vidyalaya, 1875

When girls' schools were first set up in the nineteenth century, it was generally believed that the curriculum for girls ought to be less taxing than that for boys. The Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya was one of the first institutions to provide girls with the kind of learning that was usual for boys at the time.

Girls begin going to school

Many of the reformers felt that education for girls was necessary in order to improve the condition of women.

Vidyasagar in Calcutta and many other reformers in Bombay set up schools for girls. When the first schools were opened in the mid-nineteenth century, many people were afraid of them. They feared that schools would take girls away from home, prevent them from doing their domestic duties. Moreover, girls had to travel through public places in order to reach school. Many people felt that this would have a corrupting influence on them. They felt that girls should stay away from public spaces. Therefore, throughout the nineteenth century, most educated women were taught at home by liberal fathers or husbands. Sometimes women taught themselves. Do you remember what you read about Rashsundari Debi in your book *Social and Political Life* last year? She was one of those who secretly learned to read and write in the flickering light of candles at night.

In the latter part of the century, schools for girls were established by the Arya Samaj in Punjab, and Jyotirao Phule in Maharashtra.

In aristocratic Muslim households in North India, women learnt to read the Koran in Arabic. They were taught by women who came home to teach. Some reformers such as Mumtaz Ali reinterpreted verses from the Koran to argue for women's education. The first Urdu novels began to be written from the late nineteenth century. Amongst other things, these were meant to encourage women to read about religion and domestic management in a language they could understand.

Women write about women

From the early twentieth century, Muslim women like the Begums of Bhopal played a notable role in promoting education among women. They founded a primary school for girls at Aligarh. Another remarkable woman, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain started schools for Muslim girls in Patna and Calcutta. She

was a fearless critic of conservative ideas, arguing that religious leaders of every faith accorded an inferior place to women.

By the 1880s, Indian women began to enter universities. Some of them trained to be doctors, some became teachers. Many women began to write and publish their critical views on the place of women in society. Tarabai Shinde, a woman educated at home at Poona, published a book, *Stripurushtulna*, (A Comparison between Women and Men), criticising the social differences between men and women.

Fig. 7
Pandita Ramabai

Pandita Ramabai, a great scholar of Sanskrit, felt that Hinduism was oppressive towards women, and wrote a book about the miserable lives of upper-caste Hindu women. She founded a widows home at Poona to provide shelter to widows who had been treated badly by their husbands' relatives. Here women were trained so that they could support themselves economically.

Needless to say, all this more than alarmed the orthodox. For instance, many Hindu nationalists felt that Hindu women were adopting Western ways and that this would corrupt Hindu culture and erode family values. Orthodox Muslims were also worried about the impact of these changes.

As you can see, by the end of the nineteenth century, women themselves were actively working for reform. They wrote books, edited magazines, founded schools and training centres, and set up women's associations. From the early twentieth century, they formed political pressure groups to push through laws for female suffrage (the right to vote) and better health care and education for women. Some of them joined various kinds of nationalist and socialist movements from the 1920s.

In the twentieth century, leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose lent their support to demands for greater equality and freedom for women. Nationalist leaders promised that there would be full suffrage for all men and women after Independence. However, till then they asked women to concentrate on the anti-British struggles.

Source 2

Once a woman's husband has died...

In her book, *Stripurushtulna*, Tarabai Shinde wrote:

> Isn't a woman's life as dear to her as yours is to you? It's as if women are meant to be made of something different from men altogether, made from dust from earth or rock, or riveted iron whereas you and your lives are made from the purest gold. ... You're asking me what I mean. I mean once a woman's husband has died, ... what's in store for her? The barber comes to shave all the curls and hair off her head, just to cool your eyes. ... She is shut out from going to weddings, receptions and other auspicious occasions that married women go to. And why all these restrictions? Because her husband has died. She is unlucky: ill fate is written on her forehead. Her face is not to be seen, it's a bad omen.

Tarabai Shinde, *Stripurushtulna*

Law against child marriage

With the growth of women's organisations and writings on these issues, the momentum for reform gained strength. People challenged another established custom - that of child marriage. There were a number of Indian legislators in the Central Legislative Assembly who fought to make a law preventing child marriage. In 1929 the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed without the kind of bitter debates and struggles that earlier laws had seen. According to the Act no man below the age of 18 and woman below the age of 16 could marry. Subsequently these limits were raised to 21 for men and 18 for women.

Fig. 8 - *Bride at the age of eight*
This is a picture of a child bride at the beginning of the twentieth century. Did you know that even today over 20 per cent of girls in India are married below the age of 18?

Caste and Social Reform

Some of the social reformers we have been discussing also criticised caste inequalities. Rammohun Roy translated an old Buddhist text that was critical of caste. The Prarthana Samaj adhered to the tradition of Bhakti that believed in spiritual equality of all castes. In Bombay, the Paramhans Mandali was founded in 1840 to work for the abolition of caste. Many of these reformers and members of reform associations were people of upper castes. Often, in secret meetings, these reformers would violate caste taboos on food and touch, in an effort to get rid of the hold of caste prejudice in their lives.

There were also others who questioned the injustices of the caste social order. During the course of the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries began setting up schools for tribal groups and "lower"-caste children. These children were thus equipped with some resources to make their way into a changing world.

At the same time, the poor began leaving their villages to look for jobs that were opening up in the cities. There was work in the factories that were coming up, and jobs in municipalities. You have read about

the expansion of cities in Chapter 6. Think of the new demands of labour this created. Drains had to be dug, roads laid, buildings constructed, and cities cleaned. This required coolies, diggers, carriers, bricklayers, sewage cleaners, sweepers, palanquin bearers, rickshaw pullers. Where did this labour come from? The poor from the villages and small towns, many of them from low castes, began moving to the cities where there was a new demand for labour. Some also went to work in plantations in Assam, Mauritius, Trinidad and Indonesia. Work in the new locations was often very hard. But the poor, the people from low castes, saw this as an opportunity to get away from the oppressive hold that upper-caste landowners exercised over their lives and the daily humiliation they suffered.

Fig. 9 *– A coolie ship, nineteenth century*
This coolie ship – named *John Allen* – carried many Indian labourers to Mauritius where they did a variety of forms of hard labour. Most of these labourers were from low castes.

Fig. 10 *– Madigas making shoes, nineteenth-century Andhra Pradesh*
Madigas were an important untouchable caste of present-day Andhra Pradesh. They were experts at cleaning hides, tanning them for use, and sewing sandals.

Who could produce shoes?

Leatherworkers have been traditionally held in contempt since they work with dead animals which are seen as dirty and polluting. During the First World War, however, there was a huge demand for shoes for the armies. Caste prejudice against leather work meant that only the traditional leather workers and shoemakers were ready to supply army shoes. So they could ask for high prices and gain impressive profits.

There were other jobs too. The army, for instance, offered opportunities. A number of Mahar people, who were regarded as untouchable, found jobs in the Mahar Regiment. The father of B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Dalit movement, taught at an army school.

No place inside the classroom

In the Bombay Presidency, as late as 1829, untouchables were not allowed into even government schools. When some of them pressed hard for that right, they were allowed to sit on the veranda outside the classroom and listen to the lessons, without "polluting" the room where upper-caste boys were taught.

Activity

1. Imagine that you are one of the students sitting in the school veranda and listening to the lessons. What kind of questions would be rising in your mind?
2. Some people thought this situation was better than the total lack of education for untouchable people. Would you agree with this view?

***Fig. 12** – Dublas of Gujarat carrying mangoes to the market.*
Dublas laboured for upper-caste landowners, cultivating their fields, and working at a variety of odd jobs at the landlord's house.

Demands for equality and justice

Gradually, by the second half of the nineteenth century, people from within the Non-Brahman castes began organising *movements* against caste discrimination, and demanded social equality and justice.

The Satnami movement in Central India was founded by Ghasidas who worked among the leatherworkers and organised a movement to improve their social status. In eastern Bengal, Haridas Thakur's Matua sect worked among Chandala cultivators. Haridas questioned Brahmanical texts that supported the caste system. In what is present-day Kerala, a guru from Ezhava caste, Shri Narayana Guru, proclaimed the ideals of unity for his people. He argued against treating people unequally on the basis of caste differences. According to him, all humankind belonged to the same caste. One of his famous statements was: *"oru jati, oru matam, oru daivam manushyanu"* (one caste, one religion, one god for humankind).

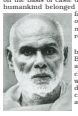


***Fig. 13** – Shri Narayana Guru*

All these sects were founded by leaders who came from Non-Brahman castes and worked amongst them. They tried to change those habits and practices which provoked the contempt of dominant castes. They tried to create a sense of self-esteem among the subordinate castes.

Gulamgiri

One of the most vocal amongst the "low-caste" leaders was Jyotirao Phule. Born in 1827, he studied in schools set up by Christian missionaries. On growing up he developed his own ideas about the injustices of caste society. He set out to attack the Brahmans' claim that they were superior to others, since they were Aryans. Phule argued that the Aryans were foreigners, who came from outside the subcontinent, and defeated and subjugated the true children of the country – those who had lived here from before the coming of the Aryans. As the Aryans established their dominance, they began looking at the defeated population as inferior, as low-caste people. According to Phule, the "upper" castes had no right to their land and power; in reality, the land belonged to indigenous people, the so-called low castes.

Phule claimed that before Aryan rule there existed a golden age when warrior-peasants tilled the land and ruled the Maratha countryside in just and fair ways. He proposed that Shudras (labouring castes) and Ati Shudras (untouchables) should unite to challenge caste discrimination. The Satyashodhak Samaj, an association Phule founded, propagated caste equality.

Fig. 13 – *Jyotirao Phule*

Source 2

"Me here and you over there"

Phule was also critical of the anti-colonial nationalism that was preached by upper-caste leaders. He wrote:

> The Brahmans have hidden away the sword of their religion which has cut the throat of the peoples' prosperity and now go about posing as great patriots of their country. They ... give this advice to ... our Shudra, Muslim and Parsi youth that unless we put away all quarrelling amongst ourselves about the divisions between high and low in our country and come together, our ... country will never make any progress ... It will be unity to serve their purposes, and then it will be me here and you over there again.
>
> *Jyotiba Phule*, The Cultivator's Whipcord

Activity

Carefully read Source 2. What do you think Jyotirao Phule meant by "me here and you over there again"?

In 1873, Phule wrote a book named *Gulamgiri*, meaning slavery. Some ten years before this, the American Civil War had been fought, leading to the end of slavery in America. Phule dedicated his book to all

Source 4

"We are also human beings"

In 1927, Ambedkar said:

> We now want to go to the Tank only to prove that like others, we are also human beings ... Hindu society should be reorganised on two main principles – equality and absence of casteism.

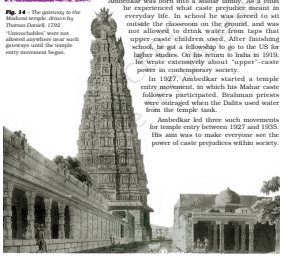


***Fig. 14** – The gateway to the Madurai temple, drawn by Thomas Daniell, 1792*
"Untouchables" were not allowed anywhere near such gateways until the temple entry movement began.

those Americans who had fought to free slaves, thus establishing a link between the conditions of the "lower" castes in India and the black slaves in America.

As this example shows, Phule extended his criticism of the caste system to argue against all forms of inequality. He was concerned about the plight of "upper"-caste women, the miseries of the labourer, and the humiliation of the "low" castes. This movement for caste reform was continued in the twentieth century by other great dalit leaders like Dr B.R. Ambedkar in western India and E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker in the south.

Who could enter temples?

Ambedkar was born into a Mahar family. As a child he experienced what caste prejudice meant in everyday life. In school he was forced to sit outside the classroom on the ground, and was not allowed to drink water from taps that upper caste children used. After finishing school, he got a fellowship to go to the US for higher studies. On his return to India in 1919, he wrote extensively about "upper"-caste power in contemporary society.

In 1927, Ambedkar started a temple entry movement, in which his Mahar caste followers participated. Brahman priests were outraged when the Dalits used water from the temple tank.

Ambedkar led three such movements for temple entry between 1927 and 1935. His aim was to make everyone see the power of caste prejudices within society.

The Non-Brahman movement

In the early twentieth century, the non-Brahman movement started. The initiative came from those non-Brahman castes that had acquired access to education, wealth and influence. They argued that Brahmans were heirs of Aryan invaders from the north who had conquered southern lands from the original inhabitants of the region – the indigenous Dravidian races. They also challenged Brahmanical claims to power.

E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, or Periyar, as he was called, came from a middle-class family. Interestingly, he had been an ascetic in his early life and had studied Sanskrit scriptures carefully. Later, he became a member of the Congress, only to leave it in disgust when he found that at a feast organised by nationalists, seating arrangements followed caste distinctions – that is, the lower castes were made to sit at a distance from the upper castes. Convinced that untouchables had to fight for their dignity, Periyar founded the Self Respect Movement. He argued that untouchables were the true upholders of an original Tamil and Dravidian culture which had been subjugated by Brahmans. He felt that all religious authorities saw social divisions and inequality as God-given. Untouchables had to free themselves, therefore, from all religions in order to achieve social equality.

Periyar was an outspoken critic of Hindu scriptures, especially the Codes of Manu, the ancient lawgiver, and the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Ramayana*. He said that these texts had been used to establish the authority of Brahmans over lower castes and the domination of men over women.

These assertions did not go unchallenged. The forceful speeches, writings and movements of lower-caste leaders did lead to rethinking and some self-criticism among upper-caste nationalist leaders. But orthodox Hindu society also reacted by founding Sanatan Dharma Sabhas and the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal in the north, and associations like the Brahman Sabha in Bengal. The object of these associations was to uphold caste distinctions as a cornerstone of Hinduism, and show how this was sanctified by scriptures. Debates and struggles over caste continued beyond the colonial period and are still going on in our own times.

Fig. 15 – *E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar)*

Source 5

Periyar on women

Periyar wrote:

> Only with the arrival of words such as 'Thara Mukurthum our women had become puppets in the hands of their husbands ... we ended up with such fathers who advise their daughters ... that they had been gifted away to their husbands and they belong to their husband's place. This is the ... result of our association with Sanskrit.

Periyar, cited in Periyar Chinthanaikal

Activity

Why does caste remain such a controversial issue today? What do you think was the most important movement against caste in colonial times?

Fig. 16 – Keshub Chunder Sen – one of the main leaders of the Brahmo Samaj

Organising for reform

The Brahmo Samaj

The Brahmo Samaj, formed in 1830, prohibited all forms of idolatry and sacrifice, believed in the Upanishads, and forbade its members from criticising other religious practices. It critically drew upon the ideals of religions – especially of Hinduism and Christianity – looking at their negative and positive dimensions.

Derozio and Young Bengal

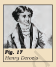


Fig. 17
Henry Derozio

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, a teacher at Hindu College, Calcutta, in the 1820s, promoted radical ideas and encouraged his pupils to question all authority. Referred to as the Young Bengal Movement, his students attacked tradition and custom, demanded education for women and campaigned for the freedom of thought and expression.

Fig. 18 *Swami Vivekananda*

The Ramakrishna Mission and Swami Vivekananda

Named after Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda's guru, the Ramakrishna Mission stressed the ideal of salvation through social service and selfless action.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), whose original name was Narendra Nath Dutta, combined the simple teachings of Sri Ramakrishna with his well founded modern outlook and spread them all over the world. After hearing him in the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, the New York Herald reported, "We feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation". Indeed, Swami Vivekananda was the first Indian in modern times, who re-established the spiritual pre-eminence of the Vedanta philosophy on a global scale. But his mission was not simply to talk of religion. He was extremely pained at the poverty and the misery of his country men. He firmly believed that any reform could become successful only by uplifting the condition of the masses. Therefore, his clarion call to the people of India was to rise above the narrow confines of their 'religion of the kitchen' and come together in the service of the nation. By sending out this call he made a signal contribution to the nascent nationalism of India. His sense of nationalism was, however, not narrow in its conception. He was convinced that many of the problems facing the mankind could only be overcome if the nations of the world come together on an equal footing. Therefore, his exhortation to the youth was to unite on the basis of a common spiritual heritage. In this exhortation he became truly 'the symbol of a new spirit and a source of strength for the future'.

The Prarthana Samaj

Established in 1867 at Bombay, the Prarthana Samaj sought to remove caste restrictions, abolish child marriage, encourage the education of women, and end the ban on widow remarriage. Its religious meetings drew upon Hindu, Buddhist and Christian texts.

The Veda Samaj

Established in Madras (Chennai) in 1864, the Veda Samaj was inspired by the Brahmo Samaj. It worked to abolish caste distinctions and promote widow remarriage and women's education. Its members believed in one God. They condemned the superstitions and rituals of orthodox Hinduism.

2020-21

The Aligarh Movement
The Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, founded by Sayyid Ahmed Khan in 1875 at Aligarh, later became the Aligarh Muslim University. The institution offered modern education, including Western science, to Muslims. The Aligarh Movement, as it was known, had an enormous impact in the area of educational reform.


Fig. 19 *Sayyid Ahmed Khan*

The Singh Sabha Movement
Reform organisations of the Sikhs, the first Singh Sabhas were formed at Amritsar in 1873 and at Lahore in 1879. The Sabhas sought to rid Sikhism of superstitions, caste distinctions and practices seen by them as non-Sikh. They promoted education among the Sikhs, often combining modern instruction with Sikh teachings.


Fig. 20 – *Khalsa College, Amritsar, established in 1892 by the leaders of the Singh Sabha movement*

ELSEWHERE

Black slaves and white planters

You have read about how Jyotirao Phule established a connection in his book *Gulamgiri* between caste oppression and the practice of slavery in America. What was this system of slavery?

From the time that European explorers and traders landed in Africa in the seventeenth century, a trade in slaves began. Black people were captured and brought from Africa to America, sold to white planters, and made to work on cotton and other plantations – most of them in the southern United States. In the plantations they had to work long hours, typically from dawn to dusk, punished for "inefficient work", and whipped and tortured.

Many people, white and black, opposed slavery through organised protest. In doing so, they invoked the spirit of the American Revolution of 1776, exhorting: "See your Declaration, Americans! Do you understand your own language?" In his moving Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln held that those who had fought slavery had done so for the cause of democracy. He urged the people to strive for racial equality so that "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth".

Fig. 21 – *Slave Sale, South Carolina, USA, 1856*
Here you see potential buyers examining African slaves at an auction.

Let's imagine

Imagine you are a teacher in the school set up by Rokeya Hossain. There are 20 girls in your charge. Write an account of the discussions that might have taken place on any one day in the school.

Let's recall

1. What social ideas did the following people support.
   Rammohun Roy
   Dayanand Saraswati
   Veerasalingam Pantulu
   Jyotirao Phule
   Pandita Ramabai
   Periyar
   Mumtaz Ali
   Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar
2. State whether true or false:
   (a) When the British captured Bengal they framed many new laws to regulate the rules regarding marriage, adoption, inheritance of property, etc.
   (b) Social reformers had to discard the ancient texts in order to argue for reform in social practices.
   (c) Reformers got full support from all sections of the people of the country.
   (d) The Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1823.

Let's discuss

3. How did the knowledge of ancient texts help the reformers promote new laws?
4. What were the different reasons people had for not sending girls to school?
5. Why were Christian missionaries attacked by many people in the country? Would some people have supported them too? If so, for what reasons?
6. In the British period, what new opportunities opened up for people who came from castes that were regarded as "low"?
7. How did Jyotirao the reformers justify their criticism of caste inequality in society?
8. Why did Phule dedicate his book *Gulamgiri* to the American movement to free slaves?
9. What did Ambedkar want to achieve through the temple entry movement?
10. Why were Jyoti rao Phule and Ramaswamy Naicker critical of the national movement? Did their criticism help the national struggle in any way?

9 The Making of the National Movement: 1870s–1947

***Fig. 1** – Police lathi-charge demonstrators during the Quit India movement*

In the previous chapters we have looked at:

- The British conquest of territories, and takeover of kingdoms
- Introduction of new laws and administrative institutions
- Changes in the lives of peasants and tribals
- Educational changes in the nineteenth century
- Debates regarding the condition of women
- Challenges to the caste system
- Social and religious reform
- The revolt of 1857 and its aftermath
- The decline of crafts and growth of industries

On the basis of what you have read about these issues, do you think Indians were discontented with British rule? If so, how were different groups and classes dissatisfied?

The Emergence of Nationalism

The above-mentioned developments led the people to ask a crucial question: what is this country of India and for whom is it meant? The answer that gradually emerged was: India was the people of India – *all the people* irrespective of class, colour, caste, creed, language, or gender. And the country, its resources and systems, were meant for all of them. With this answer came the awareness that the British were exercising control over the resources of India and the lives of its people, and until this control was ended India could not be for Indians.

This consciousness began to be clearly stated by the political associations formed after 1850, especially those that came into being in the 1870s and 1880s. Most of these were led by English-educated professionals such as lawyers. The more important ones were the Poona Sarvojanik Sabha, the Indian Association, the Madras Mahajan Sabha, the Bombay Presidency Association, and of course the Indian National Congress.

Note the name: "Poona Sarvojanik Sabha". The literal meaning of "sarvajanik" is "of or for all the people" (sarva = all + *janik* = of the people). Though many of these associations functioned in specific parts of the country, their goals were stated as the goals of all the people of India, not those of any one region, community or class. They worked with the idea that the people should be **sovereign** – a modern consciousness and a key feature of nationalism. In other words, they believed that the Indian people should be empowered to take decisions regarding their affairs.

Sovereign – The capacity to act independently without outside interference

The dissatisfaction with British rule intensified in the 1870s and 1880s. The Arms Act was passed in 1878, disallowing Indians from possessing arms. In the same year the Vernacular Press Act was also enacted in an effort to silence those who were critical of the government. The Act allowed the government to confiscate the assets of newspapers including their printing presses if the newspapers published anything that was found "objectionable". In 1883, there was a furore over the attempt by the government to introduce the Ilbert Bill. The bill provided for the trial of British or European persons by Indians, and sought equality between British and Indian judges in the country. But when white opposition forced the government to withdraw the bill, Indians were enraged. The event highlighted the racial attitudes of the British in India.

The need for an all-India organisation of educated Indians had been felt since 1880, but the Ilbert Bill controversy deepened this desire. The Indian National Congress was established when 72 delegates from all over the country met at Bombay in December 1885. The early leadership – Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji, W.C. Bonnerji, Surendranath Banerji, Romesh Chandra Dutt, S. Subramania Iyer, among others – was largely from Bombay and Calcutta. Naoroji, a businessman and **publicist** settled in London, and for a time member of the British Parliament, guided the younger nationalists. A retired British official, A.O. Hume, also played a part in bringing Indians from the various regions together.

Source 1

Who did the Congress seek to speak for?

A newspaper, *The Indian Mirror*, wrote in January 1886:

> The First National Congress at Bombay ... is the nucleus of a future Parliament for our country, and will lead to the good of inconceivable magnitude for our countrymen.

Badruddin Tyabji addressed the Congress as President in 1887 thus:

> this Congress is composed of the representatives, not of any one class or community of India, but of all the different communities of India.

A nation in the making

It has often been said that the Congress in the first twenty years was "moderate" in its objectives and methods. During this period it demanded a greater voice for Indians in the government and in administration. It wanted the Legislative Councils to be made more representative, given more power, and introduced in provinces where none existed. It demanded that Indians be placed in high positions in the government. For this purpose it called for civil service examinations to be held in India as well, not just in London.

The demand for Indianisation of the administration was part of a movement against racism, since most important jobs at the time were monopolised by white

Publicist – Someone who publicises an idea by circulating information, writing reports, speaking at meetings

Fig. 2 – Dadabhai Naoroji

Naoroji's book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* offered a scathing criticism of the economic impact of British rule.

Activity

From the beginning the Congress sought to speak for, and in the name of, *all* the Indian *people*. Why did it choose to do so?

officials, and the British generally assumed that Indians could not be given positions of responsibility. Since British officers were sending a major part of their large salaries home, Indianisation, it was hoped, would also reduce the drain of wealth to England. Other demands included the separation of the judiciary from the executive, the **repeal** of the Arms Act and the freedom of speech and expression.

Repeal – To undo law; to officially end the validity of something such as a law

The early Congress also raised a number of economic issues. It declared that British rule had led to poverty and famines: increase in the land revenue had impoverished peasants and zamindars, and exports of grains to Europe had created food shortages. The Congress demanded reduction of revenue, cut in military expenditure, and more funds for irrigation. It passed many resolutions on the salt tax, treatment of Indian labourers abroad, and the sufferings of forest dwellers – caused by an interfering forest administration. All this shows that despite being a body of the educated elite, the Congress did not talk only on behalf of professional groups, zamindars or industrialists.

The Moderate leaders wanted to develop public awareness about the unjust nature of British rule. They published newspapers, wrote articles, and showed how British rule was leading to the economic ruin of the country. They criticised British rule in their speeches and sent representatives to different parts of the country to mobilise public opinion. They felt that the British had respect for the ideals of freedom and justice, and so they would accept the just demands of Indians. What was necessary, therefore, was to express these demands, and make the government aware of the feelings of Indians.

Source 2

In pursuit of gold

This is what a Moderate leader, Dinshaw Wacha, wrote to Naoroji in 1887:

> Pherozeshah is nowadays too busy with his personal work ... They are already rich enough ... Mr. Telang too remains busy. I wonder how if all remain busy in the pursuit of gold can the progress of the country be advanced?

Activity

What problems regarding the early Congress does this comment highlight?

"Freedom is our birthright"

By the 1890s many Indians began to raise questions about the political style of the Congress. In Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab, leaders such as Bepin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai were beginning to explore more radical objectives and methods. They criticised the Moderates for their "politics of prayers", and emphasised the importance of self-reliance and constructive work. They argued that people must rely on their own strength, not on the "good" intentions of the government; people must fight for *swaraj*. Tilak raised the slogan, "Freedom is my birthright and I shall have it!"

In 1905 Viceroy Curzon partitioned Bengal. At that time Bengal was the biggest province of British India and included Bihar and parts of Orissa. The British argued for dividing Bengal for reasons of administrative convenience. But what did "administrative convenience" mean? Whose "convenience" did it represent? Clearly, it was closely tied to the interests of British officials and businessmen. Even so, instead of removing the non-Bengali areas from the province, the government separated East Bengal and merged it with Assam. Perhaps the main British motives were to curtail the influence of Bengali politicians and to split the Bengali people.

The partition of Bengal infuriated people all over India. All sections of the Congress – the Moderates and the Radicals, as they may be called – opposed it. Large public meetings and demonstrations were organised and novel methods of mass protest developed. The struggle that unfolded came to be known as the Swadeshi movement, strongest in Bengal but with echoes elsewhere too – in deltaic Andhra for instance; it was known as the Vandemataram Movement.

Fig. 3 – *Balgangadhar Tilak*
Notice the name of the newspaper that lies on the table. *Kesari*, a Marathi newspaper edited by Tilak, became one of the strongest critics of British rule.

Fig. 4 – *Thousands joined the demonstrations during the Swadeshi movement*

Fig. 3 – Lala Lajpat Rai
A nationalist from Punjab, he was one of the leading members of the Radical group which was critical of the politics of petitions. He was also an active member of the Arya Samaj.

Revolutionary violence The use of violence to make a radical change within society

Council – An appointed or elected body of people with an administrative, advisory or representative function

Activity
Find out which countries fought the First World War.

The Swadeshi movement sought to oppose British rule and encourage the ideas of self-help, *swadeshi* enterprise, national education, and use of Indian languages. To fight for *swaraj*, the radicals advocated mass mobilisation and boycott of British institutions and goods. Some individuals also began to suggest that "**revolutionary violence**" would be necessary to overthrow British rule.

The opening decades of the twentieth century were marked by other developments as well. A group of Muslim landlords and nawabs formed the All India Muslim League at Dacca in 1906. The League supported the partition of Bengal. It desired separate electorates for Muslims, a demand conceded by the government in 1909. Some seats in the **councils** were now reserved for Muslims who would be elected by Muslim voters. This tempted politicians to gather a following by distributing favours to their own religious groups.

Meanwhile, the Congress split in 1907. The Moderates were opposed to the use of boycott. They felt that it involved the use of force. After the split the Congress came to be dominated by the Moderates with Tilak's followers functioning from outside. The two groups reunited in December 1915. Next year the Congress and the Muslim League signed the historic Lucknow Pact and decided to work together for representative government in the country.

The Growth of Mass Nationalism

After 1919 the struggle against British rule gradually became a mass movement, involving peasants, tribals, students and women in large numbers and occasionally factory workers as well. Certain business groups too began to actively support the Congress in the 1920s. Why was this so?

The First World War altered the economic and political situation in India. It led to a huge rise in the defence expenditure of the Government of India. The government in turn increased taxes on individual incomes and business profits. Increased military expenditure and the demands for war supplies led to a sharp rise in prices which created great difficulties for the common people. On the other hand, business groups reaped fabulous profits from the war. As you have seen (Chapter 7), the war created a demand for industrial goods (jute bags, cloth, rails) and caused a decline of imports from other countries into India. So

Indian industries expanded during the war, and Indian business groups began to demand greater opportunities for development.

The war also lead the British to expand their army. Villages were pressurised to supply soldiers for an alien cause. A large number of soldiers were sent to serve abroad. Many returned after the war with an understanding of the ways in which imperialist powers were exploiting the peoples of Asia and Africa and with a desire to oppose colonial rule in India.

Furthermore, in 1917 there was a revolution in Russia. News about peasants' and workers' struggles and ideas of socialism circulated widely, inspiring Indian nationalists.

The advent of Mahatma Gandhi

It is in these circumstances that Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a mass leader. As you may know, Gandhiji, aged 46, arrived in India in 1915 from South Africa. Having led Indians in that country in non-violent marches against racist restrictions, he was already a respected leader, known internationally. His South African campaigns had brought him in contact with various types of Indians: Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians; Gujaratis, Tamils and north Indians; and upper-class merchants, lawyers and workers.

Mahatma Gandhi spent his first year in India travelling throughout the country, understanding the people, their needs and the overall situation. His earliest

Fig. 6 *Founders of the Natal Congress, Durban, South Africa, 1895*

In 1895, along with other nationalists, Mahatma Gandhi established the Natal Congress to fight against racial discrimination. Can you identify Gandhiji? He is standing at the centre in the row at the back, wearing a coat and tie.

interventions were in local movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad where he came into contact with Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel. In Ahmedabad he led a successful millworkers' strike in 1918.

Let us now focus in some detail on the movements organised between 1919 and 1922.

The Rowlatt Satyagraha

In 1919 Gandhiji gave a call for a *satyagraha* against the Rowlatt Act that the British had just passed. The Act curbed fundamental rights such as the freedom of expression and strengthened police powers. Mahatma Gandhi, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and others felt that the government had no right to restrict people's basic freedoms. They criticised the Act as "devilish" and tyrannical. Gandhiji asked the Indian people to observe 6 April 1919 as a day of non-violent opposition to this Act, as a day of "humiliation and prayer" and *hartal* (strike). *Satyagraha Sabhas* were set up to launch the movement.

Activity

Find out about the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. What is Jallianwala Bagh? What atrocities were committed there? How were they committed?

Fig. 7 *– The walled compound in which General Dyer opened fire on a gathering of people*
The people are pointing to the bullet marks on the wall.

Knighthood – An honour granted by the British Crown for exceptional personal achievement or public service

The Rowlatt Satyagraha turned out to be the first all-India struggle against the British government although it was largely restricted to cities. In April 1919 there were a number of demonstrations and *hartals* in the country and the government used brutal measures to suppress them. The Jallianwala Bagh atrocities, inflicted by General Dyer in Amritsar on Baisakhi day (13 April), were a part of this repression. On learning about the massacre, Rabindranath Tagore expressed the pain and anger of the country by renouncing his **knighthood**.

During the Rowlatt Satyagraha the participants tried to ensure that Hindus and Muslims were united in the fight against British rule. This was also the call of Mahatma Gandhi who always saw India as a land of all the people who lived in the country – Hindus, Muslims and those of other religions. He was keen that Hindus and Muslims support each other in any just cause.

Khilafat agitation and the Non-Cooperation Movement

The Khilafat issue was one such cause. In 1920 the British imposed a harsh treaty on the Turkish Sultan or Khalifa. People were furious about this as they had been about the Jallianwala massacre. Also, Indian Muslims were keen that the Khalifa be allowed to retain control over Muslim sacred places in the erstwhile Ottoman Empire. The leaders of the Khilafat agitation, Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, now wished to initiate a full-fledged Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhiji supported their call and urged the Congress to campaign against "Punjab wrongs" (Jallianwala massacre), the Khilafat wrong and demand *swaraj*.

The Non-Cooperation Movement gained momentum through 1921-22. Thousands of students left government controlled schools and colleges. Many lawyers such as Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, C. Rajagopalachari and Asaf Ali gave up their practices. British titles were surrendered and legislatures boycotted. People lit public bonfires of foreign cloth. The imports of foreign cloth fell drastically between 1920 and 1922. But all this was merely the tip of the iceberg. Large parts of the country were on the brink of a formidable revolt.

People's initiatives

In many cases people resisted British rule non-violently. In others, different classes and groups, interpreting Gandhiji's call in their own manner, protested in ways that were not in accordance with his ideas. In either case, people linked their movements to local grievances. Let us look at a few examples.

In Kheda, Gujarat, Patidar peasants organised non-violent campaigns against the high land revenue demand of the British. In coastal Andhra and interior Tamil Nadu, liquor shops were **picketed**. In the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, tribals and poor peasants staged a number of "forest *satyagrahas*", sometimes sending their cattle into forests without paying grazing fee. They were protesting because the colonial state

Source 3

The eternal law of suffering

What did Mahatma Gandhi mean by *ahimsa* (non-violence)? How could *ahimsa* become the basis of struggle? This is what Gandhiji said:

> Non-violence comes to us through doing good continually without the slightest expectation of return. ... [*Ahimsa*] is the indefectible lesson *in* non-violence ... In South Africa ... I succeeded in learning the eternal law of suffering as the only remedy for undoing wrong and injustice. It means positively the law of non-violence. You have to be prepared to suffer cheerfully at the hands of all and sundry and you will wish ill to no one, not even to those who may have wronged you.
>
> *Mahatma Gandhi, 12 March 1930*

Picket – People protesting outside a building or shop to prevent others from entering

Mahanta – Religious functionaries of Sikh gurdwaras

Illegal eviction – Forcible and unlawful throwing out of tenants from the land they rent

had restricted their use of forest resources in various ways. They believed that Gandhiji would get their taxes reduced and have the forest regulations abolished. In many forest villages, peasants proclaimed *swaraj* and believed that "Gandhi Raj" was about to be established.

In Sind (now in Pakistan), Muslim traders and peasants were very enthusiastic about the Khilafat call. In Bengal too, the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation alliance gave enormous communal unity and strength to the national movement.

In Punjab, the Akali agitation of the Sikhs sought to remove corrupt ***mahanta*** – supported by the British – from their gurdwaras. This movement got closely identified with the Non-Cooperation Movement. In Assam, tea garden labourers, shouting *"Gandhi Maharaj ki Jai"*, demanded a big increase in their wages. They left the British-owned plantations amidst declarations that they were following Gandhiji's wish. Interestingly, in the Assamese Vaishnava songs of the period the reference to Krishna was substituted by 'Gandhi Raja'.

Fig. 8 *– A popular representation of Mahatma Gandhi*

In popular images too Mahatma Gandhi is often shown as a divine being occupying a place within the pantheon of Indian gods. In this image he is driving Krishna's chariot, guiding other nationalist leaders in the battle against the British.

The people's Mahatma

We can see from the above that sometimes people thought of Gandhiji as a kind of messiah, as someone who could help them overcome their misery and poverty. Gandhiji wished to build class unity, not class conflict, yet peasants could imagine that he would help them in their fight against zamindars, and agricultural labourers believed he would provide them land. At times, ordinary people credited Gandhiji with their own achievements. For instance, at the end of a powerful movement, peasants of Pratapgarh in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) managed to stop **illegal eviction** of tenants; but they felt it was Gandhiji who had won this demand for them. At other times, using Gandhiji's name, tribals and peasants undertook actions that did not conform to Gandhian ideals.

Source 4

"It was he who got *beḍakhli* stopped in Pratapgarh"

The following is an extract from a CID report on the kisan movement in Allahabad district, January 1921:

> The currency which Mr. Gandhi's name has acquired even in the remotest villages is astonishing. No one seems to know quite who or what he is, but it is an accepted fact that what he says is so, and what he orders must be done. He is a Mahatma or *sadhu*, a Pandit, a Brahmin who lives at Allahabad, even a *devta* ... the real power of his name is to be traced back to the idea that it was he who got *beḍakhli* [illegal eviction] stopped in Pratapgarh ... as a general rule, Gandhi is not thought of as being antagonistic to Government, but only to the zamindars ... We are for Gandhiji and the Sarkar.

Activity

Read Source 4. According to this report, how did people view Mahatma Gandhi? Why do you think they felt that he was opposed to zamindars but not to the government? Why do you think they were in favour of Gandhiji?

The happenings of 1922-1929

Mahatma Gandhi, as you know, was against violent movements. He abruptly called off the Non-Cooperation Movement when in February 1922 a crowd of peasants set fire to a police station in Chauri Chaura. Twenty-two policemen were killed on that day. The peasants were provoked because the police had fired on their peaceful demonstration.

Once the Non-Cooperation movement was over, Gandhiji's followers stressed that the Congress must undertake constructive work in the rural areas. Other leaders such as Chitta Ranjan Das and Motilal Nehru argued that the party should fight elections to the councils and enter them in order to influence government policies. Through sincere social work in villages in the mid-1920s, the Gandhians were able to extend their support base. This proved to be very useful in launching the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930.

Two important developments of the mid-1920s were the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu organisation, and the Communist Party of India. These parties have held very different ideas about the kind of country India should be. Find out about their ideas with the help of your teacher. The revolutionary nationalist Bhagat Singh too was active in this period.

***Fig. 9** – Chitta Ranjan Das*
A major figure in the freedom movement, Das was a lawyer from East Bengal. He was especially active in the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Fig. 10 *– Demonstrators oppose the Simon Commission*

In 1927 the British government in England decided to send a commission headed by Lord Simon to decide India's political future. The Commission had no Indian representative. The decision created an outrage in India. All political groups decided to boycott the Commission. When the Commission arrived it was met with demonstrations with banners saying "Simon Go Back".

The decade closed with the Congress resolving to fight for *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence) in 1929 under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru. Consequently, "Independence Day" was observed on 26 January 1930 all over the country.

"It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear."
Inquilab Zindabad !"

Fig. 11 *– Bhagat Singh*

Revolutionary nationalists such as Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Sukhdev and others wanted to fight against the colonial rule and the rich exploiting classes through a revolution of workers and peasants. For this purpose they founded the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) in 1928 at Ferozeshah Kotla in Delhi. On 17 December, 1928, Bhagat Singh, Azad and Rajguru assassinated Saunders, a police officer who was involved in the lathi-charge that had caused the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.

On 8 April, 1929, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly. The aim, as their leaflet explained, was not to kill but "to make the deaf hear", and to remind the foreign government of its callous exploitation.

Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed on March 23, 1931. Bhagat Singh's age at that time was only 23.

The March to Dandi

Purna Swaraj would never come on its own. It had to be fought for. In 1930, Gandhiji declared that he would lead a march to break the salt law. According to this law, the state had a monopoly on the manufacture and sale of salt. Mahatma Gandhi along with other nationalists reasoned that it was sinful to tax salt since it is such an essential item of our food. The Salt March related the general desire of freedom to a specific grievance shared by everybody, and thus did not divide the rich and the poor.

Gandhiji and his followers marched for over 240 miles from Sabarmati to the coastal town of Dandi where they broke the government law by gathering natural salt found on the seashore, and boiling sea water to produce salt.

Fig. 12 - *Mahatma Gandhi breaking the salt law by picking up a lump of natural salt. Dandi, 6 April 1930.*

Women in the freedom struggle: Ambabai from Karnataka

Women from diverse backgrounds participated in the national movement. Young and old, single and married, they came from rural and urban areas, from both conservative and liberal homes. Their involvement was significant for the freedom struggle, for the women's movement, and for themselves personally.

Both British officials and Indian nationalists felt that women's participation gave the national struggle an immense force. Participation in the freedom movement brought women out of their homes. It gave them a place in the professions, in the governance of India, and it could pave the way for equality with men.

What such participation meant for women is best recounted by them. Ambabai of Karnataka had been married at age twelve. Widowed at sixteen, she picketed foreign cloth and liquor shops in Udipi. She was arrested, served a sentence and was rearrested. Between prison terms she made speeches, taught spinning, and organised *prabhat pheris*. Ambabai regarded these as the happiest days of her life because they gave it a new purpose and commitment.

Women, however, had to fight for their right to participate in the movement. During the Salt Satyagraha, for instance, even Mahatma Gandhi was initially opposed to women's participation. Sarojini Naidu had to persuade him to allow women to join the movement.

***Fig. 13** – Sarojini Naidu with Mahatma Gandhi, Paris, 1931*
Active in the national movement since the early 1920s, Naidu was a significant leader of the Dandi March. She was the first Indian woman to become President of the Indian National Congress (1925).

Peasants, tribals and women participated in large numbers. A business federation published a pamphlet on the salt issue. The government tried to crush the movement through brutal action against peaceful *satyagrahis*. Thousands were sent to jail.

The combined struggles of the Indian people bore fruit when the Government of India Act of 1935 prescribed **provincial autonomy** and the government announced elections to the provincial legislatures in 1937. The Congress formed governments in 7 out of 11 provinces.

In September 1939, after two years of Congress rule in the provinces, the Second World War broke out. Critical of Hitler, Congress leaders were ready to support the British war effort. But in return they wanted that India be granted independence after the war. The British refused to concede the demand. The Congress ministries resigned in protest.

Provincial autonomy
Capacity of the provinces to make relatively independent decisions while remaining within a federation

Source 5

Veer Lakhan Nayak was hanged

Raji Mohammad, President of the Nabrangpur Congress, Orissa in the 1950s, reports:

> On August 25, 1942 ... nineteen people died on the spot in police firing at Paparandi in Nabarangpur. Many died thereafter from their wounds. Over 300 were injured. More than a thousand were jailed in Koraput district. Several were shot or executed. Veer Lakhan Nayak (a legendary tribal leader who defied the British) was hanged.

Nayak, Raji tells us, was not worried about being executed, only sad that he would not live to see freedom's dawn.

Raji Mohammad mobilised 20,000 people to join the national struggle. He offered *satyagraha* many times over. He participated in protests against the Second World War and in the Quit India movement, and served long jail terms.

***Fig. 14** - Quit India movement, August 1942*
Demonstrators clashed with the police everywhere. Many thousands were arrested, over a thousand killed, many more were injured.

Quit India and Later

Mahatma Gandhi decided to initiate a new phase of movement against the British in the middle of the Second World War. The British must quit India immediately, he told them. To the people he said, "do or die" in your effort to fight the British, – but you must fight non-violently. Gandhiji and other leaders were jailed at once but the movement spread. It specially attracted peasants and the youth who gave up their studies to join it. Communications and symbols of state authority were attacked all over the country. In many areas the people set up their own governments.

The first response of the British was severe repression. By the end of 1943 over 90,000 people were arrested, and around 1,000 killed in police firing. In many areas orders were given to machine-gun crowds from airplanes. The rebellion, however, ultimately brought the Raj to its knees.

Towards Independence and Partition

Meanwhile, in 1940 the Muslim League had moved a resolution demanding "Independent States" for Muslims in the north-western and eastern areas of the country. The resolution did not mention partition or Pakistan. Why did the League ask for an autonomous arrangement for the Muslims of the subcontinent?

From the late 1930s, the League began viewing the Muslims as a separate "nation" from the Hindus. In developing this notion it may have been influenced by the history of tension between some Hindu and Muslim groups in the 1920s and 1930s. More

Bose and the INA

***Fig. 15** - Subhas Chandra Bose*

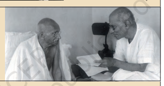
A radical nationalist, with socialist leanings, Bose did not share Gandhiji's ideal of *ahimsa*, though he respected him as the "Father of the Nation". In January 1941, he secretly left his Calcutta home, went to Singapore, via Germany, and raised the Azad Hind Fauj or the Indian National Army (INA). To free India from British control, in 1944, the INA tried to enter India through Imphal and Kohima but the campaign failed. The INA members were imprisoned and tried. People across the country, from all walks of life, participated in the movement against the INA trials.

***Fig. 16** – Maulana Azad with other members at the Congress Working Committee, Sevagram, 1942*

Azad was born in Mecca to a Bengali father and an Arab mother. Well-versed in many languages, Azad was a scholar of Islam and an exponent of the notion of *wahadat-i-deen*, the essential oneness of all religions. An active participant in Gandhian movements and a staunch advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity, he was opposed to Jinnah's two-nation theory.

***Fig. 17** – Chakravarti Rajagopalachari speaking to Gandhiji before the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, 1944*

A veteran nationalist and leader of the Salt Satyagraha in the south, C. Rajagopalachari, popularly known as Rajaji, served as member of the Interim Government of 1946 and as free India's first Indian Governor-General.



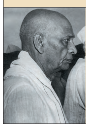


***Fig. 18** – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel played an important role in the negotiations for independence during 1945-47*

Patel hailed from an impoverished peasant-proprietor family of Nadiad, Gujarat. A foremost organiser of the freedom movement from 1918 onwards, Patel served as President of the Congress in 1931.

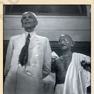


***Fig. 19** – Mohammad Ali Jinnah with Mahatma Gandhi, Bombay, September 1944*

An ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity until 1920, Jinnah played an important role in the making of the Lucknow Pact. He reorganised the Muslim League after 1934, and became the major spokesperson for the demand for Pakistan.

Fig. 20 *— Jawaharlal Nehru listens to Mahatma Gandhi before the Bombay session of the Congress, July 1946*

Gandhiji's disciple, a Congress Socialist, and an internationalist, Nehru was a leading architect of the national movement and of free India's economy and policy.

importantly, the provincial elections of 1937 seemed to have convinced the League that Muslims were a minority, and they would always have to play second fiddle in any democratic structure. It feared that Muslims may even go unrepresented. The Congress's rejection of the League's desire to form a joint Congress-League government in the United Provinces in 1937 also annoyed the League.

The Congress's failure to mobilise the Muslim masses in the 1930s allowed the League to widen its social support. It sought to enlarge its support in the early 1940s when most Congress leaders were in jail. At the end of the war in 1945, the British opened negotiations between the Congress, the League and themselves for the independence of India. The talks failed because the League saw itself as the sole spokesperson of India's Muslims. The Congress could not accept this claim since a large number of Muslims still supported it.

Elections to the provinces were again held in 1946. The Congress did well in the **"General" constituencies** but the League's success in the seats reserved for Muslims was spectacular. It persisted with its demand for 'Pakistan'. In March 1946 the British cabinet sent a three-member mission to Delhi to examine this demand and to suggest a suitable political framework for a free India. This mission suggested that India should remain united and constitute itself as a loose confederation with some autonomy for Muslim-majority areas. But it could not get the Congress and the Muslim League to agree to specific details of the proposal. Partition now became more or less inevitable.

"General" constituencies
Election districts with no reservations for any religious or other community

Fig. 21 *— Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Pashtun leader from the North West Frontier Province, with his colleagues at a peace march through Bihar, March 1947*

Also known as Badshah Khan, he was the founder of the Khudai Khidmatgars, a powerful non-violent movement among the Pathans of the North West Frontier. Khan was strongly opposed to the Partition of India. He criticised his Congress colleagues for agreeing to the 1947 division.

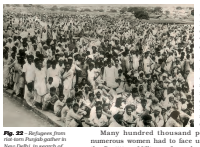


Fig. 22 – *Refugees from riot-torn Punjab gather in New Delhi, in search of shelter and food*

After the failure of the Cabinet Mission, the Muslim League decided on mass agitation for winning its Pakistan demand. It announced 16 August 1946 as "Direct Action Day". On this day riots broke out in Calcutta, lasting several days and resulting in the death of thousands of people. By March 1947 violence spread to different parts of northern India.

Many hundred thousand people were killed and numerous women had to face untold brutalities during the Partition. Millions of people were forced to flee their homes. Torn asunder from their homelands, they were reduced to being refugees in alien lands. Partition also meant that India changed, many of its cities changed, and a new country – Pakistan – was born. So, the joy of our country's independence from British rule came mixed with the pain and violence of Partition.

ELSEWHERE

Nationalism in Africa: The case of Ghana

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the rise of nationalism in many Afro-Asian countries. In many of these, nationalism arose as a part of the anti-colonial struggles for independence.

Colonial rule in Africa was dictatorial. Only the "Chiefs" were allowed to rule on behalf of the foreign powers. Alternately, laws affecting Africans were created in all-white legislatures. Africans had no decision-making powers or representation, not until after the Second World War at least. The forcible takeover of land from local owners or users, increased taxation and poor working conditions led to many African protests.

In 1957, Ghana, known until then as the Gold Coast, became the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence. The freedom movement was led by Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party through strikes, boycotts and mass rallies. In 1951 this party won a huge electoral victory. It opposed the existing system in which the British rulers had allowed the Chiefs to nominate representatives to the legislature. It pressed the British to grant a legislature that contained no nominated or special members and won this demand in 1954. Elections to the new Legislative Council were held in 1956. The Convention People's Party won these, thus paving the way for the proclamation of an independent nation under the name "Ghana".

Let's recall

1. Why were people dissatisfied with British rule in the 1870s and 1880s?
2. Who did the Indian National Congress wish to speak for?
3. What economic impact did the First World War have on India?
4. What did the Muslim League resolution of 1940 ask for?

Let's imagine

Imagine that you are involved in the Indian national movement. Based on your reading of this chapter, briefly discuss your preferred methods of struggle and your vision of a free India.

Let's discuss

5. Who were the Moderates? How did they propose to struggle against British rule?
6. How was the politics of the Radicals within the Congress different from that of the Moderates?
7. Discuss the various forms that the Non-Cooperation Movement took in different parts of India. How did the people understand Gandhiji?
8. Why did Gandhiji choose to break the salt law?
9. Discuss those developments of the 1937-47 period that led to the creation of Pakistan.

Let's do

10. Find out how the national movement was organised in your city, district, area or state. Who participated in it and who led it? What did the movement in your area achieve?
11. Find out more about the life and work of any two participants or leaders of the national movement and write a short essay about them. You may choose a person not mentioned in this chapter.

10 India After Independence

A New and Divided Nation

When India became independent in August 1947, it faced a series of very great challenges. As a result of Partition, 8 million refugees had come into the country from what was now Pakistan. These people had to be found homes and jobs. Then there was the problem of the princely states, almost 500 of them, each ruled by a maharaja or a nawab, each of whom had to be persuaded to join the new nation. The problems of the refugees and of the princely states had to be addressed immediately. In the longer term, the new nation had to adopt a political system that would best serve the hopes and expectations of its population.

Fig. 1 *- Mahatma Gandhi's ashes being immersed in Allahabad. February, 1948*

Less than six months after independence the nation was in mourning. On 30 January 1948, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a fanatic, Nathuram Godse, because he disagreed with Gandhiji's conviction that Hindus and Muslims should live together in harmony. That evening, a stunned nation heard Jawaharlal Nehru's moving statement over All India Radio: "Friends and comrades, the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere ... our beloved leader ... the Father of the Nation is no more ..."

India's population in 1947 was large, almost 345 million. It was also divided. There were divisions between high castes and low castes, between the majority Hindu community and Indians who practised other faiths. The citizens of this vast land spoke many different languages, wore many different kinds of dress, ate different kinds of food and practised different professions. How could they be made to live together in one nation-state?

To the problem of unity was added the problem of development. At Independence, the vast majority of Indians lived in the villages. Farmers and peasants depended on the monsoon for their survival. So did the non-farm sector of the rural economy, for if the crops failed, barbers, carpenters, weavers and other service groups would not get paid for their services either. In the cities, factory workers lived in crowded slums with little access to education or health care. Clearly, the new nation had to lift its masses out of poverty by increasing the productivity of agriculture, and by promoting new, job-creating industries.

Unity and development had to go hand in hand. If the divisions between different sections of India were not healed, they could result in violent and costly conflicts – high castes fighting with low castes, Hindus with Muslims and so on. At the same time, if the fruits of economic development did not reach the broad masses of the population, it could create fresh divisions – for example, between the *rich* and the poor, between cities and the countryside, between regions of India that were prosperous and regions that lagged behind.

Activity

Imagine that you are a British administrator leaving India in 1947. You are writing a letter home where you discuss what is likely to happen to India without the British. What would be your views about the future of India?

A Constitution is Written

Between December 1946 and November 1949, some three hundred Indians had a series of meetings on the country's political future. The meetings of this "Constituent Assembly" were held in New Delhi, but the participants came from all over India, and from different political parties. These discussions resulted in the framing of the Indian Constitution, which came into effect on 26 January 1950.

One feature of the Constitution was its adoption of universal adult **franchise**. All Indians above the age of 21 would be allowed to vote in state and national elections. This was a revolutionary step – for never before had Indians been allowed to choose their own leaders. In other countries, such as the United Kingdom and

Franchise – The right to vote

Fig. 2 *– Jawaharlal Nehru introducing the resolution that outlined the objectives of the Constitution*

the United States, this right had been granted in stages. First only men of property had the vote. Then men who were educated were also added on. Working-class men got the vote only after a long struggle. Finally, after a bitter struggle of their own, American and British women were granted the vote. On the other hand, soon after Independence, India chose to grant this right to all its citizens regardless of gender, class or education.

A second feature of the Constitution was that it guaranteed equality before the law to all citizens, regardless of their caste or religious affiliation. There were some Indians who wished that the political system of the new nation be based on Hindu ideals, and that India itself be run as a Hindu state. They pointed to the example of Pakistan, a country created explicitly to protect and further the interests of a particular religious community – the Muslims. However, the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was of the opinion that India could not and must not become a "Hindu Pakistan".

Besides Muslims, India also had large populations of Sikhs and Christians, as well as many Parsis and Jains. Under the new Constitution, they would have the same rights as Hindus – the same opportunities when it came to seeking jobs in government or the private sector, the same rights before the law.

A third feature of the Constitution was that it offered special privileges for the poorest and most disadvantaged

Indians. The practice of untouchability, described as a "slur and a blot" on the "fair name of India", was abolished. Hindu temples, previously open to only the higher castes, were thrown open to all, including the former untouchables. After a long debate, the Constituent Assembly also recommended that a certain percentage of seats in legislatures as well as jobs in government be reserved for members of the lowest castes. It had been argued by some that Untouchable or as they were now known, Harijan, candidates did not have good enough grades to get into the prestigious Indian Administrative Service. But, as one member of the Constituent Assembly, H.J. Khandekar, argued, it was the upper castes who were responsible for the Harijans "being unfit today". Addressing his more privileged colleagues, Khandekar said:

> We were suppressed for thousands of years... You engaged us in your service to serve your own ends and suppressed us to such an extent that neither our minds nor our bodies, and nor even our hearts work, nor are we able to march forward.

Along with the former Untouchables, the nationals or Scheduled Tribes were also granted reservation in seats and jobs. Like the Scheduled Castes, these Indians too had been deprived and discriminated against. The tribals had been deprived of modern health care and education, while their lands and forests had been taken away by more powerful outsiders. The new privileges granted them by the Constitution were meant to make amends for this.

The Constituent Assembly spent many days discussing the powers of the central government versus those of the state governments. Some members thought that the Centre's interests should be foremost. Only a strong Centre, it was argued, "would be in a position to think and plan for the well-being of the country as a whole". Other members felt that the provinces should have greater autonomy and freedom. A member from Mysore feared that under the present system "democracy is centred in Delhi and it is not allowed to work in the same sense and spirit in the rest of the country". A member from Madras insisted that

Source 1

We must give them security and rights

Nehru wrote in a letter to the Chief Ministers of states:

> ... we have a Muslim minority who are so large in numbers that they cannot, even if they want, go anywhere else. That is a basic fact about which there can be no argument. Whatever the provocation from Pakistan and whatever the indignation and horrors inflicted on non-Muslims there, we have got to deal with this minority in a civilised manner. We must give them security and the rights of citizens in a democratic State.

Activity

Imagine a conversation between a father and son in a Muslim family. After Partition, the son thinks it would be wiser for them to move to Pakistan while the father believes that they should continue to live in India. Taking information from the chapter so far (and Chapter 11), act out what each would say.

Fig. 3 *– Dr B.R. Ambedkar*
Dr B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), respectfully referred to as Babasaheb, belonged to a Maratha-speaking dalit family. A lawyer and economist, he is best known as a revered leader of the Dalits and the father of the Indian Constitution

"the initial responsibility for the well-being of the people of the provinces should rest with the Provincial Governments".

The Constitution sought to balance these competing claims by providing three lists of subjects: a Union List, with subjects such as taxes, defence and foreign affairs, which would be the exclusive responsibility of the Centre; a State List of subjects, such as education and health, which would be taken care of principally by the states; a Concurrent List, under which would come subjects such as forests and agriculture, in which the Centre and the states would have joint responsibility.

Another major debate in the Constituent Assembly concerned language. Many members believed that the English language should leave India with the British rulers. Its place, they argued, should be taken by Hindi. However, those who did not speak Hindi were of a different opinion. Speaking in the Assembly, T.T. Krishnamachari conveyed "a warning on behalf of people of the South", some of whom threatened to separate from India if Hindi was imposed on them. A compromise was finally arrived at: namely, that while Hindi would be the "official language" of India, English would be used in the courts, the services, and communications between one state and another.

Many Indians contributed to the framing of the Constitution. But perhaps the most important role was played by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who was Chairman of the Drafting Committee, and under whose supervision the document was finalised. In his final speech to the Constituent Assembly, Dr Ambedkar pointed out that political democracy had to be accompanied by economic and social democracy. Giving the right to vote would not automatically lead to the removal of other inequalities such as between rich and poor, or between upper and lower castes. With the new Constitution, he said, India was

> going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics

Activity

Discuss in your class, one advantage and one disadvantage today of the decision to keep English as a language of India.

> we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value.

How were States to be Formed?

Back in the 1920s, the Indian National Congress – the main party of the freedom struggle – had promised that once the country won independence, each major **linguistic** group would have its own province. However, after independence the Congress did not take any steps to honour this promise. For India had been divided on the basis of religion: despite the wishes and efforts of Mahatma Gandhi, freedom had come not to one nation but to two. As a result of the partition of India, more than a million people had been killed in riots between Hindus and Muslims. Could the country afford further divisions on the basis of language?

Both Prime Minister Nehru and Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhbhai Patel were against the creation of linguistic states. After the Partition, Nehru said, "disruptionist tendencies had come to the fore"; to check them, the nation had to be strong and united. Or, as Patel put it:

> ... the first and last need of India at the present moment is that it should be made a nation ... Everything which helps the growth of nationalism has to go forward and everything which throws obstacles in its way has to be rejected ... We have applied this test to linguistic provinces also, and by this test, in our opinion [they] cannot be supported.

That the Congress leaders would now go back on their promise created great disappointment. The Kannada speakers, Malayalam speakers, the Marathi speakers, had all looked forward to having their own state. The strongest protests, however, came from the Telugu-speaking districts of what was the Madras Presidency. When Nehru went to campaign there during the general elections of 1952, he was met with black flags and slogans demanding "We want Andhra". In October of that year, a veteran Gandhian named Potti Sriramulu went on a hunger strike demanding the formation of Andhra state to protect the interests of Telugu speakers. As the fast went on, it attracted much support. *Hartals* and *bandhs* were observed in many towns.

Linguistic – Relating to language

***Fig. 4** – Potti Sriramulu, the Gandhian leader who died fasting for a separate state for Telugu speakers*

On 15 December 1952, fifty-eight days into his fast, Potti Sriramulu died. As a newspaper put it, "the news of the passing away of Sriramulu engulfed entire Andhra in chaos". The protests were so widespread and intense that the central government was forced to give in to the demand. Thus, on 1 October 1953, the new state of Andhra came into being, which subsequently became Andhra Pradesh.

After the creation of Andhra, other linguistic communities also demanded their own separate states. A States Reorganisation Commission was set up, which submitted its report in 1956, recommending the redrawing of district and provincial boundaries to form compact provinces of Assamese, Bengali, Oriya, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu speakers respectively. The large Hindi-speaking region of north India was also to be broken up into several states. A little later, in 1960, the bilingual state of Bombay was divided into separate states for Marathi and Gujarati speakers. In 1966, the state of Punjab was also divided into Punjab and Haryana, the former for the Punjabi speakers (who were also mostly Sikhs), the latter for the rest (who spoke not Punjabi but versions of Haryanvi or Hindi).

The making of Linguistic States

Fig. 5 (a)
Indian Provinces and Princely States before 14 August 1947

Princely States
British India

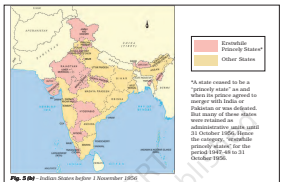


Fig. 5 (b) – *Indian States before 1 November 1956*

Activity

Look at Figs. 5 (a), 5 (b) and 5 (c). Notice how the Princely States disappear in 5 (b). Identify the new states that were formed in 1956 and later and the languages of these states.

Fig. 5 (c) – *Indian States in 1975*

***Fig. 6** – The bridge on the Mahanadi river constructed to control the flow of water*
Bridges and dams became the symbol of development in independent India.

State – Concerned with the government. (Note that used in this sense, the word does not refer to the different states which are found in a country.)

***Fig. 7** – Work going on at the Gandhi Sagar bandh*
This was the first of the four dams built on the Chambal river in Madhya Pradesh. It was completed in 1960.

Planning for Development

Lifting India and Indians out of poverty, and building a modern technical and industrial base were among the major objectives of the new nation. In 1950, the government set up a Planning Commission to help design and execute suitable policies for economic development. There was a broad agreement on what was called a "mixed economy" model. Here, both the **State** and the private sector would play important and complementary roles in increasing production and generating jobs. What, specifically, these roles were to be – which industries should be initiated by the state and which by the market, how to achieve a balance between the different regions and states – was to be defined by the Planning Commission.

In 1956, the Second Five Year Plan was formulated. This focused strongly on the development of heavy industries such as steel, and on the building of large dams. These sectors would be under the control of the State. This focus on heavy industry, and the effort at state regulation of the economy was to guide economic policy for the next few decades. This approach had many strong supporters, but also some vocal critics.

Source 2

Nehru on the Five Year Plans

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a great supporter of the planning process. He explained the ideals and purposes of planning in a series of letters he wrote to the chief ministers of the different states. In a letter of 22 December 1952, he said that:

> ...behind the First Five Year Plan lies the conception of India's unity and of a mighty co-operative effort of all the peoples of India ... We have to remember always that it is not merely the governmental machinery that counts in all this, but even more so the enthusiasm and co-operation of the people. Our people must have the sensation of partnership in a mighty enterprise, of being fellow-travellers towards the next goal that they and we have set before us. The Plan may be, and has to be, based on the calculations of economists, statisticians and the like, but figures and statistics, very important as they are, do not give life to the scheme. That breath of life comes in other ways, and it is for us now to make this Plan, which is enshrined in cold print, something living, vital and dynamic, which captures the imagination of the people.

Some felt that it had put inadequate emphasis on agriculture. Others argued that it had neglected primary education. Still others believed that it had not taken account of the environmental implications of economic policies. As Mahatma Gandhi's follower Mira Behn wrote in 1949, by "science and machinery he [mankind] may get huge returns for a time, but ultimately will come desolation. We have got to study Nature's balance, and develop our lives within her laws, if we are to survive as a physically healthy and morally decent species."

Activity

Discuss in your class whether Mira Behn was right in her view that science and machinery would create problems for human beings. You may like to think about examples of the effects of industrial pollution and de-forestation on the world today.

Fig. 8 *Jawaharlal Nehru at the Bhilai Steel Plant*
The Bhilai steel plant was set up with the help of the former Soviet Union in 1959. Located in the backward rural area of Chhattisgarh, it came to be seen as an important sign of the development of modern India after Independence.

The search for an independent foreign policy

India gained freedom soon after the devastations of the Second World War. At that time a new international body – the United Nations – formed in 1945 was in its infancy. The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of the Cold War, that is, power rivalries and ideological conflicts between the USA and the USSR, with both countries creating military alliances. This was also the period when colonial empires were collapsing and many countries were attaining independence. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was also the foreign minister of newly independent India, developed free India's foreign policy in this context. Non-alignment formed the bedrock of this foreign policy.

Led by statesmen from Egypt, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, Ghana and India, the non-aligned movement urged countries not to join either of the two major alliances. But this policy of staying away from alliances was not a matter of remaining "isolated" or "neutral". The former means remaining aloof from world affairs whereas non-aligned countries such as India played an active role in mediating between the American and Soviet alliances. They tried to prevent war – often taking a humanitarian and moral stand against war. However, for one reason or another, many non-aligned countries including India got involved in wars.

By the 1970s, a large number of countries had joined the non-aligned movement.

Fig. 9 *– Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna Menon at a meeting of the United Nations*

Krishna Menon led the Indian delegation to the UN between 1952 and 1962 and argued for a policy of non-alignment.

Fig. 10 *– Leaders of Asian and African countries meet at Bandung, Indonesia 1955*

Over 29 newly independent states participated in this conference in order to discuss how Afro-Asian nations could continue to oppose colonialism and Western domination.

The Nation, Sixty Years On

On 15 August 2007, India celebrated sixty years of its existence as a free nation. How well has the country done in this time? And to what extent has it fulfilled the ideals set out in its Constitution?

That India is still united, and that it is still democratic, are achievements that we might justly be proud of. Many foreign observers had felt that India could not survive as a single country, that it would break up into many parts, with each region or linguistic group seeking to form a nation of its own. Others believed that it would come under military rule. However, as many as thirteen general elections have been held since Independence, as well as hundreds of state and local elections. There is a free press, as well as an independent judiciary. Finally, the fact that people speak different languages or practise different faiths has not come in the way of national unity.

On the other hand, deep divisions persist. Despite constitutional guarantees, the Untouchables or, as they are now referred to, the Dalits, face violence and discrimination. In many parts of rural India they are not allowed access to water sources, temples, parks and other public places. And despite the secular ideals enshrined in the Constitution, there have been clashes between different religious groups in many states. Above all, as many observers have noted, the gulf between the rich and the poor has grown over the years. Some parts of India and some groups of Indians have benefited a great deal from economic development. They live in large houses and dine in expensive restaurants, send their children to expensive private schools and take expensive foreign holidays. At the same time many others continue to live below the poverty line. Housed in urban slums, or living in remote villages on lands that yield little, they cannot afford to send their children to school.

The Constitution recognises equality before the law, but in real life some Indians are more equal than others. Judged by the standards it set itself at Independence, the Republic of India has not been a great success. But it has not been a failure either.

***Fig. 11** - Dharavi in Bombay is one of the world's largest slums*
Notice the high-rise buildings in the background.

ELSEWHERE

What happened in Sri Lanka

In 1956, the year the states of India were reorganised on the basis of language, the Parliament of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) introduced an Act recognising Sinhala as the sole official language of the country. This made Sinhala the medium of instruction in all state schools and colleges, in public examinations, and in the courts. The new Act was opposed by the Tamil-speaking minority who lived in the north of the island. "When you deny me my language," said one Tamil MP, "you deny me everything." "You are hoping for a divided Ceylon," warned another, adding: "Do not fear, I assure you [that you] will have a divided Ceylon." An Opposition member, himself Sinhala speaking, predicted that if the government did not change its mind and insisted on the Act being passed, "two torn little bleeding states might yet arise out of one little state".

Fig. 13 – *Gun carrying Tamil militant – a symbol of the civil war in Sri Lanka*

For several decades now, a civil war has raged in Sri Lanka, whose roots lie in the imposition of the Sinhala language on the Tamil-speaking minority. And another South Asian country, Pakistan, was divided into two when the Bengali speakers of the east felt that their language was being suppressed. By contrast, India has managed to survive as a single nation, in part because the many regional languages were given freedom to flourish. Had Hindi been imposed on South India, in the way that Urdu was imposed on East Pakistan or Sinhala on northern Sri Lanka, India too might have seen civil war and fragmentation. Contrary to the fears of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel, linguistic states have not threatened the unity of India. Rather, they have deepened this unity. Once the fear of one's language being suppressed has gone, the different linguistic groups have been content to live as part of the larger nation called India.

Let's imagine

You are witness to an argument between an adivasi and a person who is opposed to the reservation of seats and jobs. What might be the arguments you heard each of them put forward? Act out the conversation.

Let's recall

1. Name three problems that the newly independent nation of India faced.
2. What was the role of the Planning Commission?
3. Fill in the blanks:
   (a) Subjects that were placed on the Union List were _____, _____ and _____.
   (b) Subjects on the Concurrent List were _____ and _____.

(c) Economic planning by which both the state and the private sector played a role in development was called a _____ _____ model.

(d) The death of _____ sparked off such violent protests that the government was forced to give in to the demand for the linguistic state of Andhra.

4. State whether true or false:

(a) At independence, the majority of Indians lived in villages.

(b) The Constituent Assembly was made up of members of the Congress party.

(c) In the first national election, only men were allowed to vote.

(d) The Second Five Year Plan focused on the development of heavy industry.

Let's Discuss

5. What did Dr Ambedkar mean when he said that "In politics we will have equality, and in social and economic life we will have inequality"?

6. After Independence, why was there a reluctance to divide the country on linguistic lines?

7. Give one reason why English continued to be used in India after Independence.

8. How was the economic development of India visualised in the early decades after Independence?

Let's Do

9. Who was Mira Behn? Find out more about her life and her ideas.

10. Find out more about the language divisions in Pakistan that led to the creation of the new nation of Bangladesh. How did Bangladesh achieve independence from Pakistan?