

Indian-British Relations during World War II

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce zkoumá, jak zapojení Indie do druhé světové války změnilo indicko-britské vztahy a ovlivnilo cestu k nezávislosti. Za využití primárních a sekundárních zdrojů analyzuje vojenský, hospodářský a politický vývoj během války. Zjišťuje, že hospodářské potíže, politická mobilizace a pochybnosti o loajalitě indických ozbrojených sil kriticky oslabily britskou kontrolu. Tyto změny v indicko-britských vztazích nakonec urychlily směřování Indie k nezávislosti.

Klíčová slova: druhá světová válka (1939-1945), nezávislost a rozdělení Indie (1947), ekonomická transformace, kolonialismus, hnutí politická

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how India's involvement in the Second World War changed Indian-British relations and influenced the path to independence. Using primary and secondary sources, this study analyses military, economic, and political developments during the war. It finds that economic hardship, political mobilisation, and doubts about the loyalty of the Indian armed forces critically weakened British control. These changes in Indian-British relations ultimately accelerated India's move toward independence.

Keywords: World War (1939-1945), independence and partition of India (1947), economic transformation, colonialism, political movements and alliances

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INTRODUCTION

At the outbreak of the Second World War, India was still under British colonial rule, which had been the case for almost a century. India became part of the Allies during the war, which meant it had to send soldiers and resources abroad. Importantly, the British colonial government had pledged India's commitment to the war without consulting the subjects, and this led to widespread criticism and the consideration of the colonial government as unilateral and authoritarian. Even so, changes in the political and social fabric of the nation meant that the Second World War would be different. The subjects were already discontent with British rule, which was evident through the growth of nationalist movements. More so, there were increased tensions between the Indian and British leaders during the war. India gained increased political, military, and economic power by the end of the war, which elevated its bargaining power in seeking the exit from colonial power.

Much research has been dedicated to the period of the Second World War in British India and its impact on the eventual gaining of independence. While some studies focus on economic development during the war, others focus on military and nationalist activities. However, far too little attention has been paid to providing a comprehensive analysis of the economic, political and military aspects of India's wartime experience in relation to its independence. Therefore, through a thorough study of primary and secondary literature, this thesis aims to bridge this gap in research by analysing how these individual aspects collectively reshaped the Indian-British relations during the Second World War and the extent to which these shifts in the relationships contributed to gaining independence.

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complicated and often oversimplified relationship between Britain and India during the period leading up to independence. By comprehensively analysing India's wartime experience, this thesis offers an alternative to interpretations leaning heavily towards a singular reason for gaining independence. Therefore, the findings of this thesis also contribute to broader discussions on how global conflicts can lead to the diminishing of imperial power.

While attempts are made to establish context by providing a brief recount of events leading up to the war and after the war, the primary focus is set on the period of the Second World War. Thus, examining these events in more detail is beyond the scope of this thesis. Additionally, due to practical constraints, the focus is mainly on the relationship between

India and Britain, although other influential parties such as the United States and Axis powers are also briefly touched upon in certain sections.

The thesis is composed of three themed chapters. Chapter One provides the necessary historical context by tracing the evolution of the Indian independence movement before the outbreak of the Second World War. This is done by examining the formation and transformation of the two most influential political organisations: the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League. The chapter also highlights the rise of Mahatma Gandhi and introduces his philosophy of nonviolent resistance. Chapter Two focuses on India's economic and military contributions to the Allied war effort. It offers a look into how the colonial government's wartime policies impacted different social groups in India, reshaped the economy, and strained the legitimacy of British rule. It also analyses the recruitment, transformation, and deployment of the Indian Army and examines how these changes affected the dynamic between Indian soldiers, British officers, and the broader colonial system. Lastly, Chapter Three analyses the key political developments that took place during the war. These include constitutional negotiations, such as the Cripps Mission; a mass resistance in the form of the Quit India Movement; and the armed struggle in the form of the Indian National Army.

1 PRE-WAR DEVELOPMENT

Before the Second World War began, the Indian independence movement had already undergone significant development, marked by growing support of the masses and growing opposition to British rule. This chapter explores the evolution of Indian nationalism by tracing the emergence and transformation of its two most influential political organisations: the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League. By examining their founding principles, key campaigns, changes in ideology, and interactions with the Indian British government, this chapter provides the necessary historical context to understand why India entered the war under protest and how these developments laid the foundation for more assertive confrontations during the war years.

1.1 The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League

According to Riddick, the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 by British and Indian intellectuals after earlier efforts to organise reforms through the Indian Union failed, and delays and denials by the British government frustrated Indian leaders.¹ Narender Singh further explains that the Congress began as a moderate platform to facilitate improved political dialogue between Indian intellectuals and the British government, and only later transformed into the mass movement that it came to be known as.² The cordial relationship between the two parties began to deteriorate in 1905, after the British government's administrative decision to partition Bengal. As Ray explains, according to the government, the decision was made to make the region's administration more effective, given its immense population. However, by partitioning Bengal, the government also aimed to weaken and divide the local nationalist movement. Nevertheless, the exact opposite happened, as according to Ray, rather than splitting them apart, the decision unified the Bengalese politicians who collectively opposed the government. Furthermore, the methods they used in doing so, the boycott and the Swadeshi Movement, laid the foundations for how future movements would be conducted.³ The latter focused on promoting Indian goods and self-

¹ John F. Riddick, *The History of British India: A Chronology* (Praeger Publishers, 2006), 77–78.

² Narender Singh, "Indian National Congress: Sessions, Contributions & Resolutions," *Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Research (JIMR)* 18, no. 10 (2023): 461, https://livejimrjournal.in/uploads/JIMR38Oct23_NS.pdf.

³ Anil Baran Ray, "Communal Attitudes to British Policy: The Case of the Partition of Bengal 1905," *Social Scientist* 6, no. 5 (1977): 34–40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3520087>.

reliance by boycotting British products, the revival of indigenous culture and building political consciousness among the population.⁴

The Indian National Congress's first major internal crisis came in 1907. According to Chatterji, in reaction to the harsh treatment by the government, internal debates arose among its members regarding the party's future direction. Senior leaders advocated for the moderate methods used up to that point, while younger, more radical members deemed these methods inefficient. This ideological divide eventually culminated in the Congress splitting into two distinct factions: the Extremists and the Moderates.⁵ As Ray notes, the differences between the two factions extended beyond the methods to their fundamental goals. While the moderates sought to improve governance through administrative reforms, the Extremists called for complete self-government.⁶ Tensions between the factions reached a boiling point at the twenty-third session of the Congress in Surat in 1907, which descended into violence. This helped to reinforce the British narrative that Indians were not ready for self-government.⁷ Consequently, the Swadeshi Movement lost mass support in 1908, as a result of Congress's split and intensified government repression, which made the continuation of the movement unsustainable. Nevertheless, Tanseem concludes that the movement was an important step in the nationalist movement as it boosted Indian industries and education. On the other hand, it also alienated Hindus and Muslims.⁸ In this context, the All-India Muslim League was officially founded in 1906 in Dhaka, after Nawab Salimullah proposed it. The League aimed to promote Muslim loyalty to the British government, protect and advance Muslim political rights and interests, and prevent hostility between Muslims and other communities.⁹

1.2 Jallianwala Bagh and the Non-Cooperation Movement

In March 1919, following the end of the First World War, the government of India passed the Rowlatt Act. This Act gave the British authorities in India greater powers, such as arresting and detaining people without trial, restricting free expression, and imposing house

⁴ Kauser Tanseem, "Defining Swadeshi Movement," *Pratidhwani the Echo* 4, no. 1 (2015): 27–28, <https://www.thecho.in/files/Kawser-Tansim.pdf>.

⁵ Nanda Lal Chatterji, "How the First Split Came in the Indian National Congress," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 21 (1958): 543–545.

⁶ Ray, "Communal Attitudes to British Policy: The Case of the Partition of Bengal 1905," 40.

⁷ Chatterji, "How the First Split Came in the Indian National Congress," 547–548.

⁸ Tanseem, "Defining Swadeshi Movement," 28.

⁹ Nadeem Shafiq Malik, "Formation of the All India Muslim League and Its Response to Some Foreign Issues – 1906 – 1911," *Journal of Political Studies* 19, no. 2 (2012): 173, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/jlo19&div=25&id=&page=>.

arrest.¹⁰ In response to these policies and the precarious economic situation, protests started springing up throughout Punjab. As Wagner explains, the government tried to pacify the situation by “deporting two local nationalist leaders from Amritsar”. However, this further escalated the situation, and as a result, the protests turned violent.¹¹ Consequently, in April of 1919, another event which agitated the masses took place in Amritsar. Here, Brigadier General Reginald Dyer was tasked with dispersing a gathering at Jallianwala Bagh. Upon reaching his destination, without any prior warning, Dyer “ordered his men to open fire,” resulting in hundreds killed and more than a thousand injured.¹²

The outrage across India at lenient treatment of General Dyer and others responsible for the brutal suppression in Amritsar, combined with the mounting anger among Muslims over the harsh peace terms imposed on the Sultan of Turkey, provided the right conditions for Gandhi and the Indian National Congress to launch their next major campaign. Thus, the Indian National Congress formally adopted Gandhi’s “progressive non-violent non-cooperation with the Government” program in Calcutta in September 1920.¹³ As Ray explains, the program of the non-cooperation movement consisted of boycotting British institutions and goods, including the refusal to attend official functions, the withdrawal of children from government schools, a boycott of British courts, nonparticipation in council elections, and promotion of Swadeshi products.¹⁴ What set the Non-cooperation movement apart from earlier independence efforts was its ability to mobilise a diverse cross-section of Indian society. These included peasants, workers, students, women, Ulama, and the urban educated class. This was partly achieved thanks to Gandhi’s ability to combine national goals with local concerns.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the movement was relatively short-lived, as Gandhi abruptly cancelled it in February 1922. The reason behind its cancellation was the Chauri Chaura incident, in which the peaceful protests descended into violence, leading to the death of several policemen. Many Congressmen did not approve of the decision, seeing it as a disappointment. However, as Low points out, Gandhi did so not only because he was

¹⁰ Riddick, *The History of British India: A Chronology*, 102.

¹¹ Kim A. Wagner, “‘Calculated to Strike Terror’: The Amritsar Massacre and the Spectacle of Colonial Violence,” *Past & Present* 233, no. 1 (2016): 185–186, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtw037>.

¹² Derek Sayer, “British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre 1919–1920,” *Past & Present* 131, no. 1 (1991): 130–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/131.1.130>.

¹³ D. A. Low, “The Government of India and the First Non-Cooperation Movement--1920-1922,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 25, no. 2 (1966): 241–242, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2051326>.

¹⁴ Rajat K. Ray, “Masses in Politics : The Non-Cooperation Movement in Bengal 1920-1922,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11, no. 4 (1974): 357, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467401100401>.

¹⁵ Farooq Ahmad Dar, Muhammad Sajid Khan, and Muhammad Abrar Zahoor, “Mass Mobilization in Indian Politics: A Case Study of Non-Cooperation Movement,” *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 10, no. 2 (2021): 18–22, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ecc1/a013871e3968fd2bc1f5c31ab1e2beb06872.pdf>.

unwilling to compromise on his principles of nonviolence but also to save his reputation in the eyes of moderate supporters. Nevertheless, Gandhi was subsequently arrested in March.¹⁶

1.3 The Simon Commission and Civil Disobedience Movement

Political tensions arose again in 1927 when Britain sent a commission to India to assess the effects of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. The mission consisted exclusively of British members and was led by Sir John Simon. The lack of any Indian members was seen as an insult, and so Gandhi called for the people to boycott the commission. As a result, there were nationwide boycotts and demonstrations throughout the commission's visit to India.¹⁷ Simon subsequently attempted to calm the situation by proposing "a joint free conference of seven Indian and seven British members presided over by the Viceroy". However, the proposal was rejected.¹⁸ The commission's findings were published nearly three years later, in June 1930. Among other things, the report recommended provincial autonomy and an elected central legislature for India. Nevertheless, the reception of the report was poor.¹⁹

In the meantime, there was an attempt to draft a new constitution for India after widespread rejection of the Simon Commission. The British Secretary of State, Lord Birkenhead, challenged Indians to prove their ability to create a constitution acceptable to a broad political spectrum.²⁰ In May 1928, this task was given to "a subcommittee under Motilal Nehru."²¹ The report recommended Dominion Status for India, a federal and parliamentary system, the abolition of separate electorates, proportional minority representation, and several administrative and linguistic reforms.²² At first, the process went seemingly smoothly, with all the parties accepting the communal questions related parts of

¹⁶ Low, "The Government of India and the First Non-Cooperation Movement--1920-1922," 252–256.

¹⁷ V. Venkatraman, "Simon Go Back!: Reflections of the Indian Press on the Boycott of Simon Commission in the Madras Presidency, 1928-1930," *SSRN*, 2019, 2, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3440022>.

¹⁸ Ralston Hayden, "India Divided on Boycott of Simon Commission," *Current History (1916-1940)* 28, no. 1 (1928): 128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45332846>.

¹⁹ Riddick, *The History of British India: A Chronology*, 107.

²⁰ Amjad Abbas Khan and Muhammad Shamshad, "Nehru Report: Triggering the Muslim Political Cohesion," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 43, no. 2 (2022): 51, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377188387_Nehru_Report_Triggering_the_Muslim_Political_Cohesion.

²¹ Bhuwan Kumar Jha, "Nehru Report, Muslim Demands and the Hindu Mahasabha: Elusive Consensus on Future Constitution," *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 66, no. 4 (2021): 538, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556120980879>.

²² Zulqarnain Haider, "Nehru Report and a Shift into Muslims Politics in India: The Evolution of Muslim Nationalism," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 12, no. 1 (2024): 607–8, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2024.v12i1.2106>.

the Nehru report in August 1928. However, this was largely due to the absence of the Muslim League's leader, Jinnah, who expressed strong opposition to the report after his arrival privately in October and publicly in December 1928. After publicly voicing his opposition to the report, many other Muslim leaders followed suit.²³ Consequently, the Nehru Report ended up as a failure. As Haider argues, by failing to "adequately address the Muslim community", the report not only failed in achieving widespread support but also divided the Hindus and Muslims for years to come.²⁴

Following the failure of the Nehru Report, the Indian National Congress shifted its goal. In December 1929, it made a call for India's complete independence. Additionally, Congress chose Gandhi to initiate a civil disobedience campaign once he found the situation convenient. Thus, in March 1930, another major step in the Indian nationalist movement started. Gandhi began the civil disobedience movement with the Salt March on 12 March 1930, ten days after he announced it to the Viceroy Irwin. In the march, Gandhi and his followers walked from Sabarmati Ashram to the coastal village of Dandi, covering over 200 miles.²⁵ According to Shani, the march aimed to "defy the salt tax and the British government's monopoly over salt collection and manufacturing". Gandhi saw the salt tax as deeply unjust because it targeted a basic necessity of life. Additionally, he believed it was especially cruel to the poor and that it affected even the most vulnerable in society.²⁶ Gandhi and his followers reached their destination on 6 April, after which they proceeded to extract salt. Like the Non-cooperation movement before, this act inspired people across the country to do the same. They organised protests, boycotts, and refused to pay taxes.²⁷

However, after a brief period of confusion, the government stepped in and arrested Gandhi on 4 May. Gandhi and other Congress leaders remained in prison until their subsequent release, ordered by Viceroy Irwin on 25 January. Gandhi was authorised by Congress to negotiate with the Viceroy, and on 5th March 1931, after two weeks of talks, a settlement was reached. This agreement, known as the Gandhi Irwin Pact, required the Congress to end the Civil Disobedience Movement and promise its participation in the

²³ Jha, "Nehru Report, Muslim Demands and the Hindu Mahasabha: Elusive Consensus on Future Constitution," 540–544.

²⁴ Haider, "Nehru Report and a Shift into Muslims Politics in India: The Evolution of Muslim Nationalism," 609–611.

²⁵ Irfan Habib, "Civil Disobedience 1930-31," *Social Scientist* 25, no. 9/10 (1997): 53–55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3517680>.

²⁶ Ornit Shani, "Gandhi's Salt March: Paradoxes and Tensions in the Memory of Nonviolent Struggle in India," essay, in *Cultural Memories of Nonviolent Struggles* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 32–33, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137032720_2.

²⁷ Habib, "Civil Disobedience 1930-31," 55–57.

Second Round Table Conference in exchange for the release of prisoners, return of seized property, withdrawal of harsh laws, and support for local industries. Additionally, it allowed poor coastal villagers to make and sell salt, but only within their own villages and mainly for personal or local use.²⁸ As Sharma points out, the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact felt like a betrayal to many as it was signed just as the movement gained momentum.²⁹ Gandhi subsequently attempted to revive the movement following the unsuccessful second round table conference. However, by then, the movement had already lost its momentum.³⁰

1.4 The Provincial Elections and Declaration of War

The last major event in India prior to the Second World War was the 1937 provincial elections. The Indian National Congress won and formed ministries in most provinces. However, in comparison, the Muslim League did poorly. Moreover, it did not do well in provinces with a Muslim majority population, which went against its claim of being “the sole representative organisation of Muslims.” However, the Congress did not fare any better in this regard. Thus, after the elections, both parties set their sights on attracting more Muslims to their cause, which ultimately pitted them against each other. The Congress subsequently proposed a “coalition ministry” with the Muslim League in the United Provinces. However, in this arrangement, the members of the League would have to join Congress. This was not acceptable to the League, which saw the arrangement as an attempt at Hindu domination. Subsequently, the relations between the two parties continued to deteriorate further, and the mutual criticisms would be along communal lines. According to Pandey, this fuelled the “separatist tendencies” of the Muslim community throughout the country.³¹

The tensions between the Congress and the colonial empire simmered on 3 September 1939 after Britain declared, and the Viceroy announced that India was at war. Yet, there were no consultations with its political leaders.³² According to Khan, this reflected

²⁸ V. Venkatraman and D. Ebi James, “Gandhi-Irwin Pact, 1931: Salt Concession, Contradiction and Cancellation - Contravention of the Delhi Pact in Madras Presidency, 1931-1933,” *SSRN*, 2021, 2–5, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3886912>.

²⁹ K. K. Sharma, “Congress, Peasants and the Civil Disobedience Movement in Bihar (1930-1932),” *Social Scientist* 16, no. 3 (1988): 50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3520199>.

³⁰ Alok Oak, “Saving Indian Villages: British Empire, the Great Depression and Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Movement,” *Studies in Indian Politics* 10, no. 2 (2022): 238, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230221135834>.

³¹ Deepak Pandey, “Congress-Muslim League Relations 1937-39: ‘The Parting of the Ways,’” *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 4 (1978): 629–37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312372>.

³² Donny Gluckstein, “India – From Famine to Independence,” in *A People’s History of the Second World War: Resistance Versus Empire*, (Pluto Press, 2012), 163, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183p5p8.17>.

Linlithgow's indifference toward India and his limited understanding of the country and its political landscape. He mistakenly assumed that the Indian population would align with his perspective.³³ On the other hand, Raghavan suggests that Linlithgow was aware that the announcement would provoke opposition. However, he proceeded regardless, believing he could stabilise the situation afterwards. Raghavan also adds that the decision was a strategic necessity, given India's crucial role in the Empire's military, economic and administrative operations in Southeast Asia.³⁴

³³ Yasmin Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 5–6.

³⁴ Srinath Raghavan, *India's War: The Making of Modern South Asia 1939-1945* (Penguin, 2016), 8–9.

2 ECONOMIC AND MILITARY TRANSFORMATION

India's involvement in the Second World War went beyond participation on the battlefield. This chapter will show that the subcontinent played an important role in supplying manpower, industrial goods, and financial resources to the Allied war effort. While Indian soldiers were deployed across multiple fronts, India underwent major economic transformations that affected different social groups in uneven ways. This chapter examines how India's military and economic contributions to the Second World War changed British Indian relations and laid the foundation for post-war demands for independence.

2.1 Wartime Industrial Expansion

During the war, the cotton textile industry grew significantly and became India's main industrial contribution to the war effort. According to Kamtekar, India produced an impressive "1.2 billion yards of cloth every year." The cloth was subsequently used for products such as military uniforms.³⁵ Tomlinson explains that this growth was driven largely by the producers' ability to continuously adapt, making do with outdated machinery, limited resources, and cheap labour.³⁶ However, while this approach produced the desired effect, it was ultimately unsustainable as it also led to severe "exhaustion of machinery and labour."³⁷ As Grajdanzev points out, the growth was also partly due to restrictions on export of cotton, which allowed Indian mills to have more than ever before. This, coupled with the high demand for finished goods, led to rapid expansion. Nevertheless, this did not automatically mean more cloth for the general population. In many cases, the focus on producing textiles for the war effort meant that the needs of poorer communities were ignored.³⁸ By 1943, this situation only worsened as the cloth became scarce and prices rose sharply. Consequently, the Indian government had to step in. They implemented controls to stop hoarding and ensure that civilians could still get enough cloth.³⁹ The textile industry remained to be the dominant industry in India during and even after the war, contributing roughly a third of total industrial output.⁴⁰

³⁵ Indivar Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945," *Past & Present*, no. 176 (2002): 195, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3600730>.

³⁶ B. R Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 116.

³⁷ Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945," 195.

³⁸ Andrew J. Grajdanzev, "India's Wartime Economic Difficulties," *Pacific Affairs* 16, no. 2 (1943): 196-197, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2751959>.

³⁹ Andrew J. Grajdanzev, "India's Economic Position in 1944," *Pacific Affairs* 17, no. 4 (1944): 465-66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2751885>.

⁴⁰ Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970*, 95.

Other industries in India grew alongside textiles. The steel and iron sectors did particularly well. The Tata Iron and Steel Company, the largest company in this area, made strong profits,⁴¹ even though production sometimes faced challenges due to coal shortages. India's chemical industry also expanded quickly because of wartime needs. This growth led to a significant decrease in India's reliance on imports.⁴² By the mid 1940s, India was making several drugs that were previously imported and started producing medical supplies for the war, such as surgical instruments and other essential equipment.⁴³ Other sectors like shipbuilding, engineering, and manufacturing also advanced. By 1941, Indian shipyards were building "corvettes, minesweepers, and motorboats" for the navy, the aviation sector began limited production of certain types of planes, and last but not least, the production of machine tools and simpler items increased sharply to meet military needs.⁴⁴

2.2 Wartime Financial Agreements

The unprecedented expansion and production of war effort-oriented industries would not be possible without sufficient financial investment. Unlike other countries of the Empire, which fully funded their own troops, Indian forces were partially paid for by Britain.⁴⁵ This came as a result of a financial agreement reached early in the war which dictated that India would pay for its share of joint war measures, domestic war production, and certain capital expenditures, whereas Britain would cover the costs of war fought outside India, such as campaigns in North Africa and later against Japan. Both the British and Indian Critics argued that these expenditures were unfairly burdensome on their respective countries. Additionally, many Indian political leaders argued that the war was not India's conflict and therefore the country's financial obligations should be limited strictly to its own defence.⁴⁶ As a result of this agreement, India's economic situation significantly changed by the end of the war, as more than £2000 million had been spent by the Indian government on the war effort. Thus, while Britain depleted its overseas assets, India went from being a nation that owed to a nation that was owed, £1000 million.⁴⁷ As Tomlinson points out, this was four times the amount India previously owed⁴⁸. Nevertheless, while the agreement provided a

⁴¹ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 85–86.

⁴² Grajdanzev, "India's Wartime Economic Difficulties," 194–195.

⁴³ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 86.

⁴⁴ Grajdanzev, "India's Wartime Economic Difficulties," 194–195.

⁴⁵ Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945," 197.

⁴⁶ Andrew J. Grajdanzev, "India's Wartime Finances," *Pacific Affairs* 16, no. 4 (1943): 418–23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2752078>.

⁴⁷ Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945," 198.

⁴⁸ Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860–1970*, 153–154.

promise of a prosperous future once the war was over, it did not provide India with the finances needed to sustain the war effort until then. As a result, the government of India had to come up with different means of raising finances during the course of the war.⁴⁹

Unlike in Britain, where “taxation and borrowing” were used to finance the war effort, this was not the case in India, as the Indian public was not willing to contribute. Thus, the Indian government made use of different means. One such means was the large-scale printing of paper currency.⁵⁰ The amount of paper currency in circulation more than tripled as it went from around “2000 million rupees in 1939 to over 7000 million rupees in 1943.”⁵¹ Additionally, British government purchases in India were often financed by new issues of paper notes rather than existing reserves. As a result, while this way of acquiring money secured the finances needed for the Indian war effort, it also resulted in severe inflation. The Indian government was subsequently reluctant to intervene as bringing inflation under control would require the use of taxation, loans and price control measures, which were likely to face pushback from the Indian population.⁵²

Another way of raising finances for the Indian war effort was the establishment of a War Fund in 1939. While voluntary in design, the reality of collecting donations by the civil servants was more akin to enforcement, as there was pressure to collect as much money as possible. Those who could afford it were persuaded to make generous donations in exchange for benefits such as administrative favours or gun licences. However, for the majority of the Indian population, the War Fund presented further financial pressure as the donations were collected irrespective of the economic situation of the individual.⁵³ Nevertheless, there was a small group of individuals keen on donating to the war fund. These were the Princes and Maharajas whom the British considered to be “the natural leaders of South Asian Society”. They ruled over approximately one-third of India under the watchful eye of the government.⁵⁴ With the beginning of the war, they sensed an opportunity to once again rise to the occasion and prove their loyalty to the government by pledging generous sums of

⁴⁹ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 51.

⁵⁰ Kamtekar, “A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945,” 199–200.

⁵¹ Grajdanzev, “India’s Wartime Finances,” 427.

⁵² Grajdanzev, “India’s Wartime Finances,” 431.

⁵³ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 51–54.

⁵⁴ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 44–45.

money. By doing so, the princes hoped to secure their political future in a changing colonial landscape.⁵⁵

2.3 The Social Impact of Wartime Economic Change

The war significantly benefited the Indian upper class (especially the industrialists), turning economic stagnation into a period of rapid expansion and extraordinary profits. Before the war, industries such as textiles had suffered from a slump, with unsold stock piling up. However, with the outbreak of war, government orders surged, clearing these stocks. Due to shipping shortages, there were also fewer imports, and as a result, the government's demand for military supplies, food provisions, and infrastructure grew. Additionally, the period allowed for practices such as "evasion of taxes and accumulation of unaccounted money", which some businesses made extensive use of.⁵⁶ Many large Indian companies took advantage of the economic situation by obtaining licenses and purchasing foreign firms. Nevertheless, it was not unusual for small businesses to quickly scale up and become exclusive suppliers of certain goods as well. In summary, from the standpoint of Indian industrialists, the war was not a period of insecurity and hardship but rather one of unprecedented opportunities.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, for India's industrial workers, the war was a period of hardship. While industrial profits increased to unprecedented levels, the urban labour force did not feel the effects. Employment opportunities increased as war-related production expanded,⁵⁸ and workers were promised better conditions, "higher pay, and special access to essential goods." As Khan points out, this initially made wartime employment seem preferable.⁵⁹ However, in reality, wages failed to keep up with inflation, and real earnings declined significantly, reaching their lowest levels in 1943, the very year when industrial profits peaked.⁶⁰ Workers often had to work longer shifts under challenging conditions, frequently changing contracts for better wages.⁶¹ Ultimately, the impact of the war on the industrial workforce varied. A small group of highly skilled workers saw higher wages due to demand, while a larger segment of organised workers in key industries had their wages adjusted for inflation but

⁵⁵ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 7–8.

⁵⁶ Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945," 201–203.

⁵⁷ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 83–86.

⁵⁸ Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945," 210.

⁵⁹ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 87.

⁶⁰ Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945," 210.

⁶¹ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 87.

still ended up slightly worse off. In contrast, the majority working in civilian industries or without union protection faced limited earnings, poor conditions, and food shortages.⁶² As Khan points out, some factory workers in “government-controlled industries” received “subsidised meals,” but this was not enough to offset the effects of inflation.⁶³

The wartime experience of India’s middle class combined new opportunities with economic challenges. The war opened job prospects for young Indians, as demand surged for personnel in government and military administration. This led to increased recruitment in clerical roles and the expanding bureaucracy, making stable jobs more accessible than ever before.⁶⁴ As wages rose, parts of the urban middle class gained disposable income for the first time, and spending on nonessential goods like gramophone records, “bicycles, and sewing machines” became prevalent.⁶⁵ However, while young workers faced favourable employment opportunities, those who had been in stable employment before the war became increasingly disillusioned and impoverished.⁶⁶ Inflation eroded purchasing power, diminishing the quality of life for government employees, teachers and municipal workers. As a result, families had to cut back on essentials as food prices soared, leading to a decline in the consumption of meat, fish, milk and eggs⁶⁷. Ultimately, the war created job opportunities for many young middle-class Indians. However, it also increased inequalities within this group, leaving long-time salaried workers in difficult situations.

The experience of India’s peasant and cultivating class during the war was marked by contrasts. The war considerably changed the standing of many cultivators as agricultural prices surged due to wartime inflation. Peasants earned “two or three times” more than before, making previously insurmountable debts more manageable with a smaller portion of their harvests covering fixed money rents and land revenue payments. Additionally, many among the cultivating class seized the opportunity to sell surplus at high prices, often on the black market. As a result, the newly acquired wealth allowed some peasants to send their sons for urban education, invest in “new enterprises such as shops and rice mills,” and enjoy material luxuries like “jewellery and tea,” which became a common feature of village life.⁶⁸ However, only a small group of people enjoyed prosperity during this time. As Grajdanzev

⁶² Grajdanzev, “India’s Wartime Finances,” 432.

⁶³ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 88.

⁶⁴ Kamtekar, “A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945,” 208.

⁶⁵ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 86.

⁶⁶ Grajdanzev, “India’s Wartime Finances,” 432.

⁶⁷ Kamtekar, “A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945,” 209.

⁶⁸ Kamtekar, “A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939-1945,” 205–207.

explains, this group included the larger landowners and wealthier farmers.⁶⁹ The rest of India's farming population, including "tenants, small landholders and landless labourers," did not see any improvement or faced worse conditions as they had "little or no extra crops to sell." As a result, they struggled with rising food prices instead of benefiting from them. Landless labourers and tenants, who had to give up a large part of their harvests as their rent, faced even bigger challenges. Meanwhile, the wealthiest landowners strongly opposed government price controls, so they kept their profits high.⁷⁰

2.4 The Bengal Famine of 1943

Malik describes the Bengal famine of 1943 as "one of the worst disasters in twentieth-century South Asia."⁷¹ While this statement may sound like an overstatement given the surrounding situation of the Second World War, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the event was a major humanitarian crisis that profoundly impacted both the Indian population and the political discourse surrounding independence. At the time of the famine, British colonial officials often cited natural causes such as crop failures and cyclones as the primary reasons.⁷² However, scholars offer different interpretations. Sweety, similarly to previous scholars like Greenough and Islam, frames the famine as an "inflationary famine" where "hoarding, black marketing and prioritisation of military demand" created an artificial shortage.⁷³ It is true that there were challenges in food production, as despite good rice production in Bengal, the harvest in other parts of India was comparatively poor. Additionally, the inability to import rice from Burma due to Japanese occupation worsened the situation.⁷⁴ However, while there were disruptions in agricultural output, the overall availability of food did not decline drastically. According to the Famine Inquiry Commission, rice supply in 1943 was only about "5 per cent below normal," a shortfall that in ordinary circumstances should not have caused mass starvation.⁷⁵ According to another compelling analysis of the famine, people were starving not because the food was

⁶⁹ Grajdanzev, "India's Wartime Finances," 432.

⁷⁰ Grajdanzev, "India's Economic Position in 1944," 460–63.

⁷¹ Senjuti Mallik, "Colonial Biopolitics and the Great Bengal Famine of 1943," *GeoJournal* 88 (2023): 3212, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-022-10803-4>.

⁷² Tarana Tabassum Sweety, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: A Review of Socio Economic and Political Aspects," *The Bengal Famine of 1943* 26 (2023): 79, https://www.historyassociation.org/admin/uploads/book/File_05F_The_Bengal_Famine_00-00.pdf.

⁷³ Sweety, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: A Review of Socio Economic and Political Aspects," 80.

⁷⁴ Kaushik Roy, "Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II," *The Journal of Military History* 73, no. 2 (2009): 516, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.0.0233>.

⁷⁵ Mufakharul M. Islam, "The Great Bengal Famine and the Question of FAD Yet Again," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2007): 424, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4132358>.

unavailable, but because they could not afford it.⁷⁶ This was the result of wartime inflation, speculation, and hoarding elements that pushed grain prices far beyond the reach of most.⁷⁷

The famine could have been prevented had there not been colonial mismanagement, particularly the absence of effective rationing and price control, which worsened the crisis.⁷⁸ Additionally, there were the deliberate choices made under Churchill's government, which contributed as well.⁷⁹ These arguments are valid, as there were problems with the handling of the food situation in India before the famine emerged. Despite the severe "food shortages and rising wheat prices reported" as early as November 1940, the British government refused India's request to import wheat from Australia due to shipping constraints.⁸⁰ However, even with the emergence of the famine, the British government's approach did not change, and military needs continued to be prioritised, which exacerbated the crisis. Winston Churchill's decision to divert "supplies of medical aid and food" meant for Bengal to European soldiers is a notable instance of this neglect.⁸¹ Additionally, Churchill did not allow India to seek aid from international organisations like the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which highlighted the political dimensions of the crisis.⁸² As Newsinger points out, these decisions worsened the situation and contributed to millions of deaths from starvation and disease.⁸³

At the same time, the newly appointed Viceroy of India, Archibald Wavell, inherited this crisis. Wavell was not the first choice of the War Cabinet, but with no other suitable candidates, Wavell had to suffice. His proactive political approach in India often clashed with Churchill's expectation that he remain a passive figure focused exclusively on wartime defence.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, despite his generally proactive approach, when faced with the Bengal famine, Wavell was more reserved. He faced internal conflicts regarding the enactment of provisions from the Government of India Act of 1935 that could have

⁷⁶ Paul R. Greenough, "Indian Famines and Peasant Victims: The Case of Bengal in 1943-44," *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (1980): 205–8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312413>.

⁷⁷ Islam, "The Great Bengal Famine and the Question of FAD Yet Again," 423.

⁷⁸ Sweety, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: A Review of Socio Economic and Political Aspects," 85.

⁷⁹ S. D. Choudhury, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: Misfortune or Imperial Schema," *Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 5 (2021): 20, <https://doi.org/10.47760/cognizance.2021.v01i05.002>.

⁸⁰ Roy, "Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II," 504.

⁸¹ Choudhury, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: Misfortune or Imperial Schema," 17.

⁸² Mallik, "Colonial Biopolitics and the Great Bengal Famine of 1943," 3217.

⁸³ John Newsinger, "War, Empire and the Attlee Government 1945–1951," *Race & Class* 60, no. 1 (2018): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396818779864>.

⁸⁴ Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Wavell's Relations with His Majesty's Government (October 1943–March 1947)," *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2009): 70, <https://sasj.pu.edu.pk/9/article/view/641/642>.

empowered him to provide resources and assistance during emergencies like the famine. However, as Jacobius explains, he chose not to intervene directly, leaving the Bengal government to handle the crisis independently, which “left the problem unresolved.”⁸⁵ In Britain, the news of famine left a strong impression on the public, especially because of photographs showing the harsh conditions. People interpreted the situation in different ways; some blamed the Indian government, while others pointed fingers at the British Empire. Despite these differing views, the British public largely supported the food relief efforts suggested by Indian nationalist groups. This support partly influenced Wavell’s later choice to send “food and medical provisions” through the RAF, which helped improve the situation, even though the aid came too late.⁸⁶

2.5 Expansion and Deployment of the Indian Army

The government began with the transformation of the Indian Army in the villages and towns of India. In 1939, its structure still reflected the prejudices of the Raj. Recruitment policy clung to the martial races theory, according to which there were certain races and castes which, due to a combination of their physical and mental attributes, were better predisposed to become soldiers.⁸⁷ As a result, the ranks of the Indian Army consisted predominantly of rural population such as the “Punjabi Musalmans, Sikhs, Dogras, Gurkhas or Rajputs.” On the other hand, the urban communities were considered to be unfit for military service.⁸⁸ To illustrate this preference, one must look no further than prewar Punjab. In 1939, Punjab and Northwest Frontier Province, which together supplied nearly half of all the army recruits despite comprising only “7% of India’s total population.”⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the recruitment policy of martial race theory was challenged and eventually relaxed as the demand for more soldiers grew.⁹⁰ Thus, as Deshpande points out, by 1943, the South Indians formed the

⁸⁵ Allie Jacobius, “‘...Our Business Is Not to Look Back But to Look Ahead.’ The Bengal Famine of 1943,” *Proceedings of the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR)*, 2016, 808, <https://libjournals.unca.edu/ncur/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/1869-Jacobius-Allie-FINAL.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Joanna Simonow, “The Great Bengal Famine in Britain: Metropolitan Campaigning for Food Relief and the End of Empire, 1943–44,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 1 (2019): 183–85, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1080/03086534.2019.1638622>.

⁸⁷ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 25.

⁸⁸ Anirudh Deshpande, “Hopes and Disillusionment: Recruitment, Demobilisation and the Emergence of Discontent in the Indian Armed Forces after the Second World War,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 33, no. 2 (1996): 177–178, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946469603300204>.

⁸⁹ Srinath Raghavan, “Building the Sinews of Power: India in the Second World War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2019, 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1570149>.

⁹⁰ Alan Jeffreys and Patrick Rose, *The Indian Army, 1939–47: Experience and Development* (Ashgate, 2012), 15.

“second largest regional group in the army”.⁹¹ Additionally, lower caste groups, long excluded, were incorporated in large numbers as well and “depressed castes amounted to nearly 60% of Hindu recruits.”⁹² As Roy points out, the enlistment in some parts of India was so aggressive that “many villages had no males except old men and young boys”.⁹³ The officer corps underwent meaningful developments during the war as well. In 1939, Indian officers were a minority. However, by 1942, their intake grew from “900 to 2000” each year of the war.⁹⁴ As Barkawi puts this into perspective, from one Indian to ten British officers in 1939, the ratio narrowed to 1:4 by 1945.⁹⁵ Since the demand for officers was high, despite prior reservations of the government, it resorted to the recruitment of “politically conscious, university-educated” Indians.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, formal equality was largely absent. Indian officers were often assigned exclusively to Indian units and treated harshly by their British counterparts.⁹⁷

Aside from the restructuring of the military, there was a large-scale mobilisation of civilians and women. Many women joined organisations like the “Women’s Auxiliary Corps, the Women’s Volunteer or St John Ambulance” where they engaged in nursing, codebreaking and logistics tasks. As Khan points out, Indian women occasionally found themselves commanding white men, which “caused consternation in Whitehall.”⁹⁸ Additionally, the army’s combat units were sustained by many noncombatants such as “miners, sappers, signalers or carriers” who, while often overlooked, played an important role.⁹⁹ This unprecedented expansion was supported by one of the most aggressive propaganda campaigns in India’s history. As a result of the early signs of recruitment fatigue in 1939, the government created a “Creative Publicity Unit”. Its vernacular campaigns emphasised pensions, honour, and social mobility.¹⁰⁰ This was a result of the government

⁹¹ Deshpande, “Hopes and Disillusionment: Recruitment, Demobilisation and the Emergence of Discontent in the Indian Armed Forces after the Second World War,” 184.

⁹² Raghavan, “Building the Sinews of Power: India in the Second World War,” 8.

⁹³ Roy, “Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II,” 518.

⁹⁴ Roy, “Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II,” 509.

⁹⁵ Tarak Barkawi, “Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 331, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036389>.

⁹⁶ Roy, “Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II,” 509.

⁹⁷ Barkawi, “Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War,” 331.

⁹⁸ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 154–155.

⁹⁹ Jeffreys and Rose, *The Indian Army, 1939-47: Experience and Development*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Deshpande, “Hopes and Disillusionment: Recruitment, Demobilisation and the Emergence of Discontent in the Indian Armed Forces after the Second World War,” 184–185.

acknowledging that it can no longer rely on inspiring the population through rhetoric of loyalty, but rather that it should communicate along the lines of protecting India. Furthermore, the government supported this by circulating stories of Japanese atrocities to inflame anger and foster cohesion.¹⁰¹

During the Second World War, the Indian Army saw extensive action in a wide variety of theatres of war. Their involvement began as early as 1940, when the Indian troops fought under the leadership of General Archibald Wavell in North Africa, where they contributed to one of the first major Allied victories of the war and “captured over 130000 prisoners.”¹⁰² Their involvement continued further, and by 1941, Indian troops had already served in “Egypt, East Africa, Iraq, and Malaya.”¹⁰³ The Indian Army further contributed with its deployment in Italy, where it conducted successful operations along the mountainous Gothic Line, drawing on specialised training in alpine warfare.¹⁰⁴ However, the Indian Army faced the most gruelling fighting in Burma in 1944, where the 14th Army under the leadership of Lieutenant General Bill Slim, sought to stop the Japanese invasion in a decisive battle.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the Japanese assault on Imphal and Kohima in 1944 forced Indian and Allied troops into brutal defensive warfare.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, despite exhaustion and close-quarters combat, morale within the 14th Army was high, sustained by training, organisation, and sheer determination.

However, this wasn’t always the case, as the soldiers’ discipline tended to fluctuate. For instance, in 1942, Indian morale was at its lowest level and only recovered after the hard lessons of the Arakan campaign in 1943. The factors mainly responsible for the Indian Army’s discipline or lack thereof were the “supply of good rations, access to sex and service conditions.”¹⁰⁷ The situation on the battlefield was further complicated by a rigid hierarchy structured by race. This was the case even among the British and Indian officers, the latter of whom were prohibited from “accessing clubs, swimming pools, buses, and railway

¹⁰¹ Sanjoy Bhattacharya, “British Military Information Management Techniques and the South Asian Soldier: Eastern India during the Second World War,” *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 497, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/313072>.

¹⁰² Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 35.

¹⁰³ Raghavan, “Building the Sinews of Power: India in the Second World War,” 5.

¹⁰⁴ Jeffreys and Patrick Rose, *The Indian Army, 1939-47: Experience and Development*, 81.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffreys and Patrick Rose, *The Indian Army, 1939-47: Experience and Development*, 139.

¹⁰⁶ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 245-246.

¹⁰⁷ Kaushik Roy, “Discipline and Morale of the African, British and Indian Army Units in Burma and India during World War II: July 1943 to August 1945,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 6 (2010): 1256–1259, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40926529>.

carriages.”¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the Indian officers were subject to lower salaries and more limited commissions than their British counterparts, despite sharing the same risks. However, there were exceptions, and despite these differences, the Indian officers generally remained professional. That is not to say that they were politically loyal to Britain, quite the contrary. Their loyalty was to their homeland, whose future after the war was uncertain.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, as Khan points out, the proximity to combat sometimes dissolved these hierarchies and bolstered cohesion.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Roy, “Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II,” 509.

¹⁰⁹ Barkawi, “Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War,” 332–335.

¹¹⁰ Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 73.

3 POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

While the Second World War battlefield was far from India, the political consequences of the conflict were felt strongly. As the war progressed, growing tensions between Indian political leaders and the British Indian government resulted in significant political developments that ultimately changed the landscape of India's independence movement. This chapter examines four key wartime developments: the All-Muslim League's Lahore Resolution; the failed attempts of August Offer and the Cripps Mission; the launch of the Quit India Movement; and the activities of the Indian National Army. This chapter examines these developments to explore how political resistance during the war years altered the relationship between Britain and India and brought the goal of independence closer.

3.1 The Muslim League and Lahore Resolution

According to Singh, at the beginning of the war, the League promised to provide support to the British government in 1939 on two conditions: justice and fairness in the Congress provinces, and that the consent and approval of the League would be sought in any constitutional advancement initiatives. However, no formal agreements were made, and the British sought to court the support of the League while also using it to attack Congress, which was highly opposed to any alliances with the British.¹¹¹ Over time, the League's position would change. According to Suri, as a form of protest to the British unilateral decision to include India in the war, the Congress ministries resigned in 1939. This essentially gave the Muslim League a free hand to expand its influence and capture political power in provinces like Punjab, Bengal and Sind.¹¹²

Dar reveals that the next major step came in March 1940, at a Muslim League session held in Lahore. After two days filled with long-winded and captivating speeches delivered by Jinnah and thorough discussions about its contents, the Lahore declaration was presented. The declaration rejected the existing plan for a united India and demanded the creation of independent Muslim majority states with strong protections for minorities. Additionally, the

¹¹¹ Uma Shanker Singh, "Launching the Individual Satyagraha: A Prelude to the Quit India Movement," *The Mirror* 2 (2015): 116, [https://www.cinnamaracollege.org/Publication/pdf/The%20Mirror,%20Vol-II,%202015\(PDF\).PDF](https://www.cinnamaracollege.org/Publication/pdf/The%20Mirror,%20Vol-II,%202015(PDF).PDF).

¹¹² Shashi Suri, "Lahore Resolution and Punjab Politics," *African Diaspora Journal of Mathematics* 25, no. 6 (2022): 402, <https://newjournalzone.in/index.php/ijmfsmr/article/view/243>.

resolution called for the Muslim League to help design a new constitutional framework for these regions.¹¹³

The reception of the Lahore resolution varied. According to Sandhu, the Congress leadership tried to hide their true opinions. However, Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad eventually criticised the idea of independent states. On the other hand, Gandhi took on a more accepting attitude and declared that he would not oppose the scheme. The British leaders, like Lord Linlithgow, opposed the scheme as well. They did not like the idea of dividing the country, as it went against their efforts to keep India united. Furthermore, their perception was that the League did not have enough support for the demand to be realistic.¹¹⁴ Despite its reception, the Lahore Resolution was an important step for the Muslim community. Dar goes as far as to call the resolution “the most important event in the history of modern South Asia.” While this claim may be taken as an overexaggeration on Dar’s part, he rightly concludes that it gave the Muslims in India a clear goal towards which they could strive.¹¹⁵

3.2 The August Offer and the Cripps Mission

The August Offer and the Cripps Mission were significant political developments during the war that impacted India’s independence, especially because they did not address the main concerns plaguing the country. Britain was losing its position in the initial phases of the war, and the Japanese entry into the Axis powers increased India’s resolve to gain support. More so, the British faced an impending strike on India, which meant their support would be necessary to avoid India’s inclination toward the Axis powers.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, there was a growing pressure on Britain to offer more significant political concessions to India from outside forces like the U. S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt¹¹⁷ and the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek¹¹⁸.

¹¹³ Farooq Ahmad Dar, “Jinnah and the Lahore Resolution,” *JRSP* 52, no. 1 (2015): 134–41, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/8-%20PC%20Farooq%20A%20Dar_52-1-15.pdf.

¹¹⁴ Akhtar Hussain Sandhu, “Communitarian Response to the Lahore Resolution of 1940 in the British Punjab: An Analytical Discourse,” *Al-Hikmat* 31 (2011): 32–35, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/phill/pdf_files/49-35%20Communitarian%20Response%20to%20the%20Lahore%20Resolution%20of%201940%20in%20the%20British%20Punjab%20An%20Analytical%20Discourse.pdf.

¹¹⁵ Dar, “Jinnah and the Lahore Resolution,” 149–150.

¹¹⁶ Nicholas Owen, “The Cripps Mission of 1942: A Reinterpretation,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 30, no. 1 (2002): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530208583134>.

¹¹⁷ Bhim Sen Singh, *The Cripps Mission: A Handiwork of British Imperialism* (Sani H. Panhwar, 1979), 26–27.

¹¹⁸ Singh, *The Cripps Mission: A Handiwork of British Imperialism*, 23–24.

The first major attempt to break the political deadlock between Britain and India came in July 1940, when the Indian National Congress presented its conditions for India's cooperation in the war effort. As Mishra explains, these included Britain's promise of independence once the war was over, and the immediate formation of a Provisional National Government. The Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, addressed these demands on August 8, 1940, with a different proposal. In his proposal, Linlithgow offered to expand his executive council to include more Indian representatives and the establishment of a War Advisory Council consisting of Indian state representatives. However, the offer was almost unanimously rejected by all of the major political parties, including the Congress and the Muslim League. Additionally, the offer was not met with support from the general population either. Thus, the August offer achieved no real progress.¹¹⁹

Another attempt to break the deadlock came in March 1942, when Britain sent a mission led by Sir Stafford Cripps to India to persuade them to support the war effort. As Batool and Mohyuddin explain, Cripps' initial offer was that India would be granted dominion status after the end of the war, and an elected constituent assembly would be formed to draft its new constitution.¹²⁰ An important element of the proposal was the option for provinces and princely states to opt out and become separate dominions. This was an implicit recognition of the potential for the creation of Pakistan.¹²¹

Cripps' proposals were rejected by both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Congress rejected the Cripps proposals mainly because they did not explicitly address the issue of independence.¹²² As Datta points out, moderate Congress leaders like Nehru were initially open to negotiations, and for some time, it seemed that the two parties would reach an agreement. However, Gandhi remained firmly opposed to the proposal from the start of the negotiations.¹²³ The Muslim League rejected the proposals for different reasons. According to Dar, the League opposed the Cripps proposals because even though the creation of Pakistan was implied, it was not explicitly guaranteed. Additionally, the League's leader, Jinnah, believed that the Cripps proposals favoured the Congress over the

¹¹⁹ Basanta Kumar Mishra, "India's Response to the British Offer of August 1940," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 40 (1979): 717–19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44142017>.

¹²⁰ Attia Batool and Zafar Mohyuddin, "Cripps Mission: A Negotiatory Effort," *Journal of Historical Studies* 8, no. 2 (2022): 147, https://jhs.bzu.edu.pk/upload/Vol-II-22_article07-22-2.pdf_38.pdf.

¹²¹ Singh, *The Cripps Mission: A Handiwork of British Imperialism*, 47

¹²² Sukanta Pramanik, "Cripps Mission: The Beginning Process to the Way of Indian Independence," *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* 19, no. 3 (2014): 4, <https://www.iostjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol19-issue3/Version-7/A019370107.pdf>.

¹²³ V.N. Datta, "The Cripps Mission, Its Failure and Significance," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 63 (2002): 646–48, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44158132>.

League, endangered minority rights and undermined the demand for Pakistan.¹²⁴ Thus, like the August offer before, Cripps' mission failed to break the deadlock. According to Datta, the mission's failure tends to be attributed to several reasons: the British reluctance to make meaningful steps toward Indian self-government, Gandhi's opposition to India's wartime involvement, poor coordination among British officials, and Cripps' mishandling of negotiations.¹²⁵

The Cripps mission played a role in advancing India's independence by indicating that Britain was wary of losing its hold on the country. At the same time, it also elevated the desperation for India's self-rule. Pramanik argues that Cripps' proposal that India would be granted dominion status in the post-war period and a constitution-making body indicated that the British were preparing for a likely loss of India. Additionally, the dissatisfaction with the Cripps mission led to increased fervour regarding pursuing independence.¹²⁶ As a result, Gandhi was more committed to launching mass movements that now demanded the British's complete withdrawal. Thus, Gandhi launched the Quit India movement in line with the need to continue pursuing independence.¹²⁷

3.3 The Quit India Movement

The aftermath of Cripps's failure to garner support for the war led to the Quit India movement's emergence, one of the defining moments in the nationalist struggle. It is important to note that, much as the movement grew following the failure of the Cripps mission, it was largely an outcome of the growing discontent with British rule for decades. However, no major uprising occurred during the war, although reports indicated a likely insurrection. In a March 1942 report by India's Central Intelligence Department, there was an appreciation of the circulation of wild rumours and stories creating unrest. More so, there were concerns that any likely invasion of India would lead to outbreaks of internal resistance. In this regard, the British were wary that they did not have major support from the public, and India was willing to accept Japanese occupation.¹²⁸ The anxiety in the public and the opposition to continued British rule provided the right conditions for Mahatma Gandhi to

¹²⁴ Farooq Ahmad Dar, "Cripps Mission and Political Deadlock in India," *Journal of Historical Studies* 8, no. 2 (2022): 120–21, https://jhs.bzu.edu.pk/upload/Vol-II-22_article05-22-2.pdf_05.pdf.

¹²⁵ Datta, "The Cripps Mission, Its Failure and Significance," 644.

¹²⁶ Pramanik, "Cripps Mission: The Beginning Process to the Way of Indian Independence," 1.

¹²⁷ Batool and Mohyuddin, "Cripps Mission: A Negotiatory Effort," 150.

¹²⁸ A. Roy, "World War II and the Prospect of 'Quit India' in Bengal: Perceptions, Rumours and Revolutionary Parties," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2021.1855813>.

bolster the nationalist movement. According to Rauf, Gandhi based the calls of the Quit India campaign in 1942 on the belief that Japan would not invade the country if Britain left.¹²⁹

Although Gandhi had intended the resistance to be a non-violent movement, it quickly descended into violence as Britain responded brutally. As Ramanjineyulu points out, at the beginning of the war, Mahatma Gandhi was a proponent of nonviolence and even pledged not to embarrass the British during the war through struggles or movements. However, circumstances changed, and the Indian public opposed continued colonial rule. Thus, the All-India Congress Committee that met in Bombay on 8 August 1942 sanctioned the beginning of the mass struggle.¹³⁰ Gandhi gave a revolutionary call through the “Do or Die” speech, in which he urged Indians to fight for freedom and emphasised self-sacrifice and immediate action.¹³¹ According to Duarah, the Quit India Movement represented a subtle yet significant shift in Gandhi’s approach, as he recognised that violence might be an unavoidable consequence of mass resistance.¹³² However, Greenough adds that even though some underground rebels misinterpreted Gandhi’s call as a justification for sabotage and armed rebellion against the British¹³³, in 1944 Gandhi condemned the violent tactics and reaffirmed his commitment to nonviolence.¹³⁴

This approach marked a turning point in the relations with Britain, as India had never before shown such resolve. Such motivations would be pivotal in advancing India closer to attaining independence from the British. The response from the British was the arrest of Gandhi and all members of the Congress on 9 August.¹³⁵ More so, the press was censored to control the dominant narrative in the country at the time.¹³⁶ The outcome was violent protests

¹²⁹ Abdul Rauf, “External and Internal Impulses of British Policy Towards India during World War II,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 51, no. 1 (2014): 60, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/2v51_No1_14.pdf.

¹³⁰ D. Ramanjineyulu, “Mahatma Gandhi and the Quit India Movement: A Study of Gandhian Strategy and Dynamics,” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* 12, no. 5 (2023): 5, [https://ijmer.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/volume12/volume12-issue5\(2\)/2.pdf](https://ijmer.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/volume12/volume12-issue5(2)/2.pdf).

¹³¹ Paul R. Greenough, “Political Mobilization and the Underground Literature of the Quit India Movement, 1942-44,” *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 3 (1983): 356–57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312297>.

¹³² Abhigyan R. Duarah, “Quit India Movement: An Analysis of Its Nature and Ideas Behind It,” *Indian Journal of Social Science and Literature* 2, no. 3 (2023): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.54105/ijssl.C1052.032323>.

¹³³ Greenough, “Political Mobilization and the Underground Literature of the Quit India Movement, 1942-44,” 363.

¹³⁴ Greenough, “Political Mobilization and the Underground Literature of the Quit India Movement, 1942-44,” 382.

¹³⁵ Hanshika Manku, “Quit India Movement,” *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2023): 1709, <https://doi.org/10.1000/IJLMH.115006>.

¹³⁶ Greenough, “Political Mobilization and the Underground Literature of the Quit India Movement, 1942-44,” 354.

from the masses as the government unleashed terror on the public where this led to the deaths of thousands.¹³⁷ With people getting angrier, this only fueled violent protests, and the public gained control of villages, citizens, and towns.¹³⁸ In effect, the movement transformed from nonviolent to full-blown violent protest, and this indicated the anger of the Indian public and their commitment to the attainment of freedom at all costs.

Its decentralised nature was a key feature of the protests and a contributing factor to its success in pursuing independence. The British government arrested Mahatma Gandhi and members of the Congress, thereby implying that the protests became leaderless in most regions. Despite the arrest of leaders, the mass movement and protests persisted as local citizens and leaders took the mantle of ensuring continued civil disobedience. The outcome was the emergence of diverse approaches to resistance because of the growing frustration. In a telegram sent to Winston Churchill by the Viceroy, he noted that he had been engaged in a meeting to address one of the “most serious rebellions since 1857.”¹³⁹ The comments indicate that the British were appreciating the intensity of the violence and the effects that it was having on the ability to manage the colony. Civil disobedience and protests are regarded as weapons for the weak and resource poor who lack direct access to the policymaking process.¹⁴⁰ Engagement in such acts means that decision makers cannot disregard public opinion and interests in an issue. The prevalence and decentralised nature of the Quit India movement implied that the British could no longer ignore the issue, mainly because it also had social and economic effects when it needed support during the war.

Much as there were political developments in India because of the protests, Britain faced issues and tensions that probably further depicted its weakness and the likelihood of exiting India. Much of the British reaction to the Quit India movement was condemnation that influenced the high levels of violence meted out to the protesters. Even so, the Leftist group in Britain extended its support to the Indian Congress and noted that appeasement would be needed in light of the impending Japanese attack. The solution extended by Lord Huntingdon was that Britain needed to exit India and grant the country's leadership to

¹³⁷ Golam Murshid, “Muslim Participation in the Quit India Movement of Birbhum District,” *Online Journal of Multidisciplinary Subjects* 12, no. 3 (2018): 356, <https://www.researchguru.net/volume/Volume%2012/Issue%203/RG44.pdf>.

¹³⁸ Vikas, “Quit India: A Movement of Mass Participation,” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews* 1, no. 3 (2022): 27, <https://doi.org/10.56815/IJMRR.V1.I3.2022/27-31>.

¹³⁹ Duarah, “Quit India Movement: An Analysis of Its Nature and Ideas Behind It,” 2.

¹⁴⁰ Ruud Wouters and Stefaan Walgrave, “Demonstrating Power: How Protest Persuades Political Representatives,” *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 2 (2017): 362, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417690325>.

Congress. In this regard, there were demands for the release of the captured prisoners and the subsequent appointment of Gandhi as the Viceroy.¹⁴¹ Although Britain did not incline towards this direction, the sentiments indicated that there was internal opposition to the atrocities being committed in India. Effectively, such factors would help compel the British government to grant independence to India a few years after the end of the war.

Within India, the movement gained momentum and helped impose pressure on the British government, especially because all the groups in society, including students, workers, and women, supported the nationalist protests. The decentralisation of the movement because of the arrest of top leadership allowed for the participation of different groups using varied approaches to meet the goal of civil disobedience. Students were some of the main protest participants, and their organization was based on the region they came from.¹⁴² For example, students from the Rayalaseema district held a meeting on 10 August 1942, and protests began on the same day.¹⁴³ During the meeting, speakers were subjected to three months' imprisonment following prosecution under the Criminal Law Amendment Act.¹⁴⁴ On 12 August, students of the Presidency College held a meeting that determined the need for continued protests despite the calls from communist leaders to refrain from the strike.¹⁴⁵ The fact that imprisonment, harassment and deaths did not stop the students' participation indicates the importance given to the nationalist movement and the need to attain freedom. Workers from different sectors partook in the protests and sustained the overt and underground movements.¹⁴⁶ Women were also prominent in the movement, where their sacrifice was regarded as pertinent to the success of Quit India, and their involvement was both violent and non-violent.¹⁴⁷ People from all castes were working together, weakening

¹⁴¹ Rauf, "External and Internal Impulses of British Policy Towards India during World War II," 61.

¹⁴² Sanjib Patra, "Localized Insurgencies: A Critical Examination of Bhagwanpur's Role in the Quit India Movement," *Social Science Journal for Advanced Research* 4, no. 3 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.54741/ssjar.4.4.1>.

¹⁴³ Vellore. Ramabrahmam, C. Sivakumar, and J. Narayana, "Quit India Movement in Madras Presidency, with Special Reference to Rayalaseema," *Journal of Indian History and Culture*, no. 26 (2020): 218, <https://journalcpriir.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/jihc-26th-issue.pdf#page=214>.

¹⁴⁴ Ramabrahmam, Sivakumar, and Narayana, "Quit India Movement in Madras Presidency, with Special Reference to Rayalaseema," 218.

¹⁴⁵ S. Babu, "Quit India Movement and the Violent Mass Upsurge in Tamil Nadu," *Journal of Indian History and Culture*, no. 26 (2020): 204, <https://journalcpriir.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/jihc-26th-issue.pdf#page=200>.

¹⁴⁶ C. Francis Xavier, "Contribution of the Coimbatore Working Class to the Quit India Movement of 1942," *Journal of Indian History and Culture*, no. 28 (2021): 339, <https://journalcpriir.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/28th-issue-jihc-2021-online.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ Vishali Kesar, "Gandhi's Quit India Movement," *International Journal of Research* 11, no. 6 (2024): 226–227, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.12531169>.

the separation structures in society and accelerating the pace of reform.¹⁴⁸ The campaign was effective through participation alone, incorporating new actors and new dimensions to the nationalist movement at all levels.¹⁴⁹ Most importantly, the participation of different groups in society indicated a common goal across India regarding the pursuit of independence and the preparedness to suffer for it. The widespread discontent with British rule meant that the colonial government was no longer popular and could not ignore the need for political reforms in the country.

The Quit India movement lasted for about one year but had significant impacts, especially since it affirmed that the country was ungovernable by the British in the long term. Even though Gandhi had committed to the “do or die” mantra, he discouraged the nationalist movements about a year after realising that the people had yet to comprehend the essence of nonviolence fully.¹⁵⁰ The British response to the movement was that Gandhi and the Congress were responsible for the outcomes of the protests.¹⁵¹ More so, prior preparation and using brute force also contributed to the end of the protests without granting freedom to the country. Even so, the impacts of the movement were perverse as nationalist sentiments grew, and the Indian population was wary of its power concerning the ability to demand their freedom. The nationalist ideals grew so much during this period that the Hindus and Muslims laid down their differences to support the movement. For the British, there was the realisation that they could not stay within India for long and had to start to pave the way for independence. In this regard, the movement significantly contributed to attaining independence as it altered the nature of political negotiations between India and Britain.

3.4 The Indian National Army

The Indian National Army was first established in 1942 by Captain Mohan Singh, a British Indian Army officer who had been captured by the Japanese during their rapid conquests in Southeast Asia, including the fall of Malaya and Singapore.¹⁵² Recognising an opportunity to weaken British rule in India, the Japanese sought to enlist Indian prisoners of war to form

¹⁴⁸ Murshid, “Muslim Participation in the Quit India Movement of Birbhum District,” 359.

¹⁴⁹ Bidyut Chakrabarty, “Political Mobilization in the Localities: The 1942 Quit India Movement in Midnapur,” *Modern Asian Studies* 26, no. 4 (1992): 792, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00010076>.

¹⁵⁰ Manku, “Quit India Movement,” 1714.

¹⁵¹ Monika Rani, “Contested Memories: Nationalist Historiography and Quit India Movement,” *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts* 4, no. 1 (2023): 835, <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.2114>.

¹⁵² Harkirat Singh, “Genesis of the Indian National Army,” *Online Journal of Multidisciplinary Subjects* 12, no. 4 (March 2019): 303, <https://www.researchguru.net/volume/Volume%2012/Issue%204/RG40.pdf>.

a military force against the British. With the Japanese support, Mohan Singh began recruiting from the thousands of Indian prisoners of war held in Southeast Asia.¹⁵³ He gained initial backing from Indian expatriates and nationalist organisations such as the Indian Independence League led by Rash Behari Bose¹⁵⁴. However, this arrangement did not last long, as the first Indian National Army collapsed in January 1943, and according to Douds, this was because of differences in Japanese intentions and Indian expectations.¹⁵⁵ The movement was revived later under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose, who transformed the Indian National Army into a more structured force.¹⁵⁶

Along with the reorganisation of the Indian National Army, Subhas Chandra Bose introduced his own political philosophy, which he called Samyavada. According to Tumiotto, Samyavada emerged as essentially a blend of communism and fascism. However, while these were the foundations of the ideology, Tumiotto stresses that Samyavada was made for India's specific needs and therefore should be viewed as its own thing.¹⁵⁷ Bose's vision for India went beyond politics. As Chaturvedi explains, Bose wanted India to become a strong industrialised nation built on the state's economic planning. Additionally, Bose believed that the government should play a central role in modernising key industries and ensuring social equity.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, unlike Gandhi, Bose believed India could only achieve independence through armed revolution.¹⁵⁹

Bose took control of the Indian National Army in Singapore in July 1943.¹⁶⁰ Bose personally led recruitment efforts by appealing to the vast Indian expatriate community in Southeast Asia. He encouraged them to join the struggle for independence through his charismatic speeches filled with nationalist fervour. This inspired many to enlist, and as a result, the ranks of the Indian National Army grew significantly, with soldiers eager to fight

¹⁵³ Girish Singh, "Role of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) of Subhash Chandra Bose in Freedom Struggle of India," *International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management* 4, no. 6 (November 2017): 2255, https://ijarasem.com/admin/img/18_Role.PDF.

¹⁵⁴ Singh, "Genesis of the Indian National Army," 304.

¹⁵⁵ G. J. Douds, "The Men Who Never Were: Indian POWs in the Second World War," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 27, no. 2 (2004): 200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1479027042000236634>.

¹⁵⁶ Singh, "Genesis of the Indian National Army," 305.

¹⁵⁷ Maria Tumiotto, "Strategy or Fascination? Subhas Chandra Bose's Relations with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and the Making of Sāmyavāda (1930s–1940s)," *Global Intellectual History*, 2023, 15. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1080/23801883.2023.2278785>.

¹⁵⁸ Deepesh Chaturvedi, "Netaji's Idea for Independent India," *Manthan* 44, no. 3 (2023): 56–57, <http://library.bjp.org:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/3171/1/manthan-july-september-2023-english.pdf#page=52>.

¹⁵⁹ Chaturvedi, "Netaji's Idea for Independent India," 52.

¹⁶⁰ Anuradha Jaiswal, "Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle for Independence," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 3, no. 6 (2014): 31, <https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/34191052/F0364031034-libre.pdf>.

for a free India.¹⁶¹ Bose aimed to legitimise the Indian independence movement further, and thus, in October 1943, the Provisional Government of Free India was established in Singapore.¹⁶² According to Jewaria, the provisional government was recognised by key Axis powers including Germany, Italy and Japan. Additionally, steps were taken to strengthen the authority of this new government further by issuing its “own currency, postage stamps, court and civil code”¹⁶³. Demonstrating his progressive vision, Bose also established the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, which was the first all-female combat unit in modern Indian history.¹⁶⁴

The most significant military campaign in which the Indian National Army and the Japanese participated was the Imphal Offensive. According to Pillay, the offensive began in March 1944 and aimed to capture Imphal and Kohima, triggering an uprising against the British in India. Initially, the offensive made considerable progress, capturing several British posts and taking several prisoners who subsequently joined the Indian National Army. However, the most significant contribution of the Indian National Army in the offensive was its groups specialising in propaganda and psychological warfare, which successfully spread confusion and discontent among the British and Indian troops. Nevertheless, despite the initial gains, the offensive was unsuccessful. It was ultimately called off in July 1944 due to difficulties with the supply lines caused by the monsoons and the army's generally poor health. As Pillay notes, the offensive's failure marked the end of the Indian National Army's military involvement.¹⁶⁵ According to Kuracina, Bose would later try to flee to the Soviet Union. However, he never reached his destination as he perished in a plane accident in August 1945. The captured members of the Indian National Army were subsequently subjected to trials on claims of “treason and committing brutality against their fellow Indian soldiers”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Singh, “Role of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) of Subhash Chandra Bose in Freedom Struggle of India,” 2256.

¹⁶² Singh, “Role of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) of Subhash Chandra Bose in Freedom Struggle of India,” 2257.

¹⁶³ Neetu Jewaria, “Role of Subhash Chandra Bose in National Movement,” *Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History* 3, no. 2 (2022): 62, <https://cajssh.casjournal.org/index.php/CAJSSH/article/view/277/610>.

¹⁶⁴ Nidhi Gaur, “Rani of Jhansi Regiment: Revisiting Subhash Chandra Bose, Women and India's Freedom Struggle,” *Ansh - Journal of History* 4, no. 1 (2022): 76, https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/116586440/09_20nidhi_20gaur-libre.pdf.

¹⁶⁵ P. R. Pillay, “The Indian National Army in the Imphal Offensive,” *Nidan: International Journal for Indian Studies* 1999, no. 11 (1999): 32–36, https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/AJA10165320_140.

¹⁶⁶ William F. Kuracina, “Sentiments and Patriotism: The Indian National Army, General Elections and the Congress's Appropriation of the INA Legacy,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2010): 828–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X09990291>.

Following the defeat of the Indian National Army, the British government attempted to reassert its authority by holding public trials at the Red Fort. According to Singh, several officers were accused of treason, torture and collaboration with the enemy. By doing so, the British hoped that “the public opinion would turn against the Indian National Army”.¹⁶⁷ However, as Kumar explains, the trials achieved the opposite. They united the Indian public, who collectively protested and demanded the release of the prisoners. Furthermore, while initially the political parties, such as the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, were indifferent to the trials, they soon sensed an opportunity to gain the support of the masses by extending their support for the release of the prisoners.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, the Indian National Army prisoners' legal defence was led by Congress members, including Jawaharlal Nehru.¹⁶⁹ According to Mukherjee, the trials took a philosophical turn as the legal defence challenged the legal assumptions surrounding British rule in India. Additionally, the defence relied on international law and extended the perspective that colonised subjects had the unconditional right to engage in war for their liberation. Furthermore, the contention was that the Indian National Army formed in Singapore deserved to be regarded as belligerent.¹⁷⁰ As Singh reveals, the Indian National Army trial ended with all officers found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, but public pressure forced their release. Soon after, the rest of the prisoners were released as well, under the condition of being barred from joining the new Indian Armed Forces.¹⁷¹

3.5 The End of the War

India did not gain independence immediately following the end of the Second World War. As Khan notes, while Britain and the rest of Europe celebrated the Allied victory, back in India, the situation was more sombre. To many, the rhetoric of winning the fight for freedom came across as ironic, given India was still not free. Furthermore, the feeling that the war was not India's concern remained widespread. Thus, for the Indian population, the war's end

¹⁶⁷ Singh, “Role of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) of Subhash Chandra Bose in Freedom Struggle of India,” 2258–2259.

¹⁶⁸ Rajeev Kumar, “Reaction of Political Parties Against the Trial on Indian National Army (INA) in 1945,” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* 12, no. 5 (2023): 97, [https://ijmer.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/volume12/volume12-issue5\(1\)/18.pdf](https://ijmer.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/volume12/volume12-issue5(1)/18.pdf).

¹⁶⁹ Singh, “Role of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) of Subhash Chandra Bose in Freedom Struggle of India,” 2258–2259.

¹⁷⁰ Mithi Mukherjee, “The ‘Right to Wage War’ against Empire: Anticolonialism and the Challenge to International Law in the Indian National Army Trial of 1945,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 44, no. 2 (2019): 423, <https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2019.12>.

¹⁷¹ Singh, “Role of Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) of Subhash Chandra Bose in Freedom Struggle of India,” 2259.

came not as a moment of reflection and joy but as a time to look ahead to what the future holds for India.¹⁷² However, they were not the only ones pondering this question. In Britain, the newly elected Labour government led by Clement Attlee also realised that granting India independence would be necessary. According to Newsinger, the Labour Government initially hoped to find a compromise in which India would be divided into smaller parts and given independence. At the same time, Britain would keep the military bases and control over the armed forces. However, this was not feasible as there was strong opposition from both Congress and the general population, and should the situation escalate, the government had neither the resources nor the manpower to withstand it.¹⁷³ Thus, in February 1947, the Labour government formally announced that Britain aimed to leave India by June 1948. According to Dar, Louis Mountbatten became the last British Viceroy and was given the task of seeing Britain's departure from India. After a series of difficult negotiations with the Indian leaders, he decided to propose the partition of the subcontinent into two countries: India and Pakistan. Under pressure to act quickly, Mountbatten changed the date of British departure to August 1947. This was much earlier than what was originally planned, and as a result, there was not enough time to manage the consequences of partition.¹⁷⁴ As Raghavan reveals, the situation that followed was tragic, with widespread instances of "staggering violence and ethnic cleansing."¹⁷⁵ The catastrophic consequences of partition, however, lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹⁷² Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, 22–23

¹⁷³ Newsinger, "War, Empire and the Attlee Government 1945–1951," 69.

¹⁷⁴ Farooq Ahmad Dar, "British Policy and the Transfer of Power in India," *Journal of Political Studies* 21, no. 1 (2014): 200–211,

<https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/jlo21&div=13&id=&page=>.

¹⁷⁵ Raghavan, *India's War: The Making of Modern South Asia 1939–1945*, 458.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how the economic, military, and political aspects of India's involvement in the Second World War collectively reshaped Indian-British relations and the extent to which these shifts in the relationships contributed to gaining independence. The research has shown that the war had a strong impact on the Indian-British relations. While India's gaining of independence cannot be attributed to a single cause, the research demonstrated that the political, economic and military developments during the war had a strong impact on weakening the ability of the British Indian government to maintain control. This makes the war a turning point which accelerated the collapse of imperial authority and set the stage toward eventual independence.

As a result of Britain's economic reliance on India during the war, there was a shift in the balance of power between the two. By the end of the war, Britain became a debtor to India, which subsequently limited its means to finance military or administrative operations without Indian cooperation. As a result, this financial dependency significantly reduced the British government's ability to act unilaterally, especially in moments of civil unrest.

The wartime developments further shook the foundations of British control due to the changes in the armed forces. After the emergence of the Indian National Army, the loyalty of the Indian army, which was the main instrument through which the government upheld the colonial order, could no longer be taken for granted. The Indian National Army's symbolic challenge to colonial legitimacy and the widespread sympathy it enjoyed among the civilians and soldiers made the British government reluctant to rely on Indian troops for internal repression. At the same time, by the end of the war, the Indian army had undergone a process of Indianization in which many of the recruits were politically conscious and less loyal to the British government. Thus, the colonial state, once sustained by the use of force, now faced serious doubts about whether the force could still be reliably used in future.

Political steps were also significant. The failure of British political initiatives such as the August Offer and the Cripps Mission highlighted the disconnect between the British government and Indian nationalists. The subsequent Quit India Movement was a major departure from the previous mass movements. Whereas earlier nationalist campaigns had relied on strong central leadership, the Quit India Movement demonstrated that the masses are able to mobilise without central figures like Gandhi. Additionally, it demonstrated that without the leadership to control the movement, the population was prone to much more

violent acts of defiance. Overall, these changes in the Indian-British relationship collectively revealed that by the end of the war, the very mechanisms on which British India had functioned had been severely undermined. The wartime period did not merely intensify the already existing tensions; it pushed the Indian-British relations to a point where imperial rule was no longer viable.

This thesis contributes to the field by demonstrating how global war can dismantle colonial systems not only through external conquest but also through internal contradictions. By examining how the economic, military, and political dynamics of Indian-British relations evolved during the Second World War, it moves beyond singular explanations for decolonisation. It offers a more nuanced understanding of imperial decline. The war did not simply weaken Britain, it strengthened India's claim to sovereignty by undermining the colonial structures that had sustained foreign rule for nearly two centuries.

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