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History: A Vital Foundation of India's International Relations

How Indians conceive of their country, its origins, its development through history, and its past relations with others is a vital component of how they imagine, construct, and aspire to develop India's contemporary international relations.

How did India and Indians develop over time?[1] The question of what India and being Indian represented in a pre-nation-state era is far from simple and can be freighted with a variety of interpretations. Readings of the past are always at risk of being viewed through the categories of present-day politics and contemporary approaches to economic and social policy.

No single-chapter survey of Indian history could conceivably translate its rich complexity and diversity. At times, in both north and south India it comprised several (sometimes many) kingdoms and other polities—some resembling republics—each vying for recognition, respect, and space. Rather, the paragraphs that follow attempt to sketch out aspects of Indian experience over the millennia that are relevant to its contemporary self-image as well as some past efforts to project abroad Indian aspirations, values, and power. Inevitably, much more is left out than is included.

The historical overview contained in this chapter will address a number of problematic yet common myths regarding key features of Indian civilization, especially with regard to the nature of religious communities and their interaction, as well as the nature of processes of immigration and accommodation of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups over the centuries. The spread of multiple faiths in India and the complex nature of cultural exchange that has existed throughout Indian history point to a cosmopolitan development of the modern state that today is India, favouring its essential pluralism, although some within India would dispute this assertion.

Two broad phenomena emerge as constants in the history of India. First, the repeated influx of peoples and ideas from the northwest, at times in the form

of invasions, but more often through migration, pastoral circuits, or as traders and missionaries, is striking. Second, barring the colonial period, Indian history is characterized by alternating cycles of imperial consolidation and processes of decentralization, with foreign influences accommodated and assimilated, and 'cultural fusions' occurring throughout.[2] Decentralization did not necessarily portend overall decline but was often characterized by regional economic and cultural growth and assertion. For instance, the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire coincided with the emergence of new states in core regions such as Gandhara and Kalinga that became economically developed. Thus, though the Mauryan Empire lasted only for about 150 years, after which central control declined rapidly, the latter period was nevertheless characterized by regional economic growth.[3] At times, several major dynasties and civilizations (as well as some interesting minor ones) cohabited productively within the subcontinent.

Modern writing on Indian history began with colonial accounts of the Indian past.[4] Much of the colonial historiography was preoccupied with the differentiation between indigenous and alien communities (and later Indian nationalist historiography dwelt on this dimension extensively). Indian civilization came to be seen as essentially Hindu and Sanskritic. Turkish, Afghan, and Mughal chronicles were perceived as alien to Indian civilization, 'even though their contents concerned Indian society and politics and the people whom they wrote about had settled in India to become part of Indian society'.[5] Gradually, canonized European perceptions of Indian culture as uniform influenced the way Indians themselves viewed their past, essentially promoting the idea of an unchanging continuity of society and religion over 3,000 years in a geographic space both well-defined and yet constantly shifting in its contours.[6]

A concept of India defined by religion?

Indian history is often, quite questionably, understood as a succession: first of Hindu civilization, then Muslim rule followed by the British Raj.[7] This organization of Indian history along a clear, simplified timeline and largely along religious lines goes back to James Mill's *History of British India* written in the early nineteenth century.[8] Its perception of the Indian past informs much teaching of history today, in India and beyond, and therefore also informs politics in South Asia to this day.[9]

Initially, Vedic Hindu civilization was thought to begin with the arrival of Aryans on the subcontinent in the second millennium BC. The notion of an Aryan invasion goes back to Max Müller.[10] Müller argued that Aryans originated in Central Asia, with one branch moving to Europe and another

reaching India through Iran. According to Müller, Aryans represented a super-ior civilization and subjugated indigenous populations (and their culture) in northern India.[11] Although historians have now dismissed this theory, it still has a firm grip on wider perceptions. It is now commonly accepted that the Indo-Aryan label refers mostly to language, and that as Indo-Aryans spread over north India, they incorporated into theirs elements of already existing languages.[12]

In the early twentieth century, with the discovery of archaeological sites pointing to the existence of high civilization in the Indian subcontinent much before the arrival of an Aryan language group, some Indian historiog-raphy (associated most often with the Hindu faith) shifted from supporting a theory of Aryan invasion, to arguing that Aryans and their language, Sanskrit, were indigenous to India.[13]

> The amended theory became axiomatic to their belief that those for whom the subcontinent was not the land of their ancestors and the land where their religion originated were aliens. This changed the focus in the definition of who were indigenous and who were aliens...the aliens were...Muslims and Christians whose religion had originated in west Asia...According to this theory only the Hindus, as the lineal descendants of the Aryans, could be defined as indigenous and therefore inheritors of the land, and not those whose ancestry was of the subcontinent, but who had been converted to Islam and Christianity.[14]

More generally, for many, history projects not only out of the past, but also into the future: 'Nation-states are widely conceded to be "new" and "histor-ical", the nation to which they give political expression always looms out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glides into limitless future'.[15]

India was not, throughout history, a self-contained unit, either geographic-ally or culturally.[16] In geographical terms, the various kingdoms and regions that preceded the modern Indian nation state had fluctuating borders, and peoples from different parts of the world flowed into the region. Thus, the Indian nation state is best seen as a modern construct—albeit one with a rich past in other forms—that is not grounded in a defined territory (or constant form of society) inherited from a pre-modern past.[17]

Today the cultural and geographical unity of India is usually mapped on the territory covered by terms such as Bharatvarsha, Aryavata, and Jambudvipa in ancient scriptures, which are projected back to the earliest Vedic period.[18] By the nineteenth century these geographical terms came to be seen as coeval with the territory covered by British India and the princely states under its protection. Yet, Bharatvarsha, the term most commonly referred to, is men-tioned nowhere in the Vedas, except as the name for one of several Vedic clans.[19] In later literature, the territory denoted by it expands and contracts,

often leaving out large tracts of northern India and, by and large, excluding southern India.

The term Hinduism itself is relatively recent. It is not used in Sanskrit in a self-representational way by any religious community before the nineteenth century. The concept of Hindu religion as a monolith seems to have been introduced by missionaries from the west. Major strands of Hinduism such as Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism that are today seen as mere sub-sects of Hinduism could have been and still be viewed as autonomous religions no less distinct than Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.[20]

India through the prism of geography

Most historians of India describe, or presume, coherent core regions—that is, areas characterized by stable, long-term political and cultural institutions. Like magnets, the political cores at the heart of these regions give rise to armies and attract scholars, foreign visitors, long-distance merchants, and crucially, court chroniclers. Owing to the considerable data often left behind by such groups, these regions also attract modern historians, explaining why core areas like north India, Bengal, or the Tamil south are comparatively well covered in the historical literature while the Deccan in central India is a relatively understudied region, because it developed no enduring political identity or capital.[21]

Since regions and empires in India have fluctuated greatly it would pose a challenge to write the history of contact between outside civilizations and a nation that has lacked a consistent geopolitical form or even developed a centre of gravity. Of course, in the case of north India a relatively continuous sequence of polities based in or near Delhi evolved, but they featured fluctuating borders contracting and expanding considerably over time, occasionally including Afghanistan, for example.

Similarly, south India does not constitute a homogeneous unit, though it is conventionally identified as the Dravidian area south of the Krishna river, with two macro-ecological zones: the Malabar coast in what is now Kerala to the west, and the wider plains to the east in Tamil Nadu with its Coromandel coast. Historians have focused mostly on the Tamil plain, which produced a succession of 'high civilizations' beginning with the Pallavas in the third century and continued by the remarkably sophisticated mercantile, industrial, and agrarian society under the Cholas between the fifth and thirteenth centuries. The two subregions differed in climate and social organization, but both played a notable role in developing overseas economic ties.

Trade

At various times, the southern part of the Indian subcontinent served as a link in the sea route connecting the Mediterranean region and the Middle East with China and other Asian destinations. While the west coast attracted ships from Africa and Arabia, on the east coast ships from China or the islands and peninsulas of Indonesia, Malaysia, or Thailand found harbour.[22]

Various parts of the regions that now comprise India evolved strong links with other parts of the world millennia ago, the earliest going back to the Indus and Harappan civilization, 2600–1700 BC. As excavations have shown, there were extensive relations in terms of trade, cultural contact, and possibly even the exchange of populations with port cities in ancient Mesopotamia.[23] South India also likely witnessed extensive trade exchanges in the seventh and sixth centuries BC. For example, there is evidence of maritime intercourse between Babylon and south India, with gold, spices, and fragrant woods being received from India.[24]

By the first millennium BC, there were extensive commercial links between the Red Sea and northwest India. Control of this trade may have been captured by Arabs as early as the third century BC. During the 'classic' Hellenic and Roman periods the nature of these contacts becomes better documented. Sophisticated navigation manuals for the sea route to India testify to Europe's long-standing trade with the subcontinent. A number of literary references corroborate this. Petronius in the early first century AD refers disapprovingly to the gossamer cottons adorning Roman women; Pliny in the mid-first century AD provides an account of the sea route to India via Egyptian ports. Ptolemy's geography of the second century AD includes a description of the Malabar coast.[25] Romans imported luxury items such as precious stones, silks, and spices as well as sugar, cotton, and fruits. Trade seems to have weighed heavily in favour of India. Indeed several Roman emperors had to enact laws against the export of bullion from the empire to the East, since Rome produced very few commodities of value for India (the British were to face similar problems in the early phases of trade relations with India).[26]

Soft power: cultural exchange

At various points in time, India occupied an eminent position in the world economy and through the ages attracted peoples from different parts of the world. People from China, Turkey, Persia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe settled in India and became a part of its civilization. Many left extensive accounts of their experience and contact with Indian civilization. Some came to India as traders or soldiers, others such as early Chinese pilgrim Fa

Hsien were part of ongoing exchanges of scholars and embassies between their two countries. Likewise, of course, Indian cultural and spiritual influence spread throughout Asia in varying forms of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, China, and Japan, but also of Hinduism, the latter still represented in major archaeological sites as far afield as Indonesia. Buddhism eventually declined in the land of its origin from the thirteenth century AD onwards.

India as a saga of empires?

The concept of 'empire' as a defining category in Indian historiography became fashionable during the colonial period, when a few empires of the past were helpful in presenting the Raj as part of an ongoing legacy.[27] Typically, India was thus presented as a sequence of grand ventures characterized by extensive territory, monumental architecture, and imperial ambitions— followed inevitably by protracted periods of atrophy and disintegration.

The Mauryan Empire

The Mauryan Empire (approximately 321–185 BC) represents the earliest known attempt at imperial government in India, which for the first time brought together many diverse social and cultural systems of the subcontinent under a single highly centralized bureaucracy. The empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya in 321 BC and centred in the metropolis of Pataliputra (modern-day Patna in Bihar). A series of military campaigns brought the Ganges plains and later the northwestern regions, where the departure of Alexander of Macedon had left a power vacuum, under Chandragupta's control.

The Seleucid region of what are today Afghanistan, Baluchistan, and Makran also devolved to Chandragupta. As the history of this region was characterized throughout by shifts between major states centered on present-day Iran and northern India, it is unlikely that local populations—themselves of varying cultures—would conceive of the dynasties that were ruling them as particularly 'foreign'.[28]

Around the fourth century BC, the Mauryan Empire expanded greatly in the north, though the extent of its presence and influence in the south is not clear. The kingdoms of south India (together with Sri Lanka) are mentioned in the second and thirteenth edicts of Asoka. There appear to have been friendly relations with these kingdoms, with Asoka sending missionaries to preach the *Dhamma* amongst the people of these kingdoms, but there is no indication that he attempted to conquer them.[29] By the time of Bindusara, the second Mauryan emperor, who came to the throne in 297 BC, large parts of the

subcontinent had come under Mauryan control although relations with king-doms of the far south and today's Sri Lanka, that were not a part of the empire remained cordial. But the Mauryan Empire encountered sustained hostility in the kingdom of Kalinga on the east coast (on the territory of what is now Orissa), which was eventually conquered by Bindusara's son Asoka.

The Kalinga war is historically significant since it was said that the brutality and destruction of the campaign filled Asoka with profound remorse and encouraged him to consider the Buddhist social ethic of tolerance and non-violence seriously (although it is unclear whether he actually converted to Buddhism). Furthermore, under Asoka, Buddhism became an actively pros-elytizing belief system and missions that were sent to various parts of the world eventually led to the propagation of Buddhism all over Asia by the beginning of the Christian era.[30] Nevertheless, like many profoundly Chris-tian leaders in the West, Asoka's Buddhist faith was often practised in the breach: in spite of a commitment to non-violence, he preserved capital pun-ishment for certain crimes and the state still relied on a large army.

Asoka's commitment to defining and propagating a new ideology and social ethic for the empire was unprecedented and unique in Indian history. Many historians have interpreted Asoka's propagation of *Dhamma* as an explicit attempt to make Buddhism the religion of Mauryan India. However, Romila Thapar argues that the numerous rock and pillar edicts spread through the empire were rather 'concerned with using a broader ethic to explore ways of governance and to reduce social conflict and intolerance'.[31] Though one category of inscriptions explicitly proclaims Asoka's adherence to Buddhism, the considerably larger category of inscriptions spread throughout the empire propagates concepts and principles formulated in a manner that would render them acceptable to people belonging to any religious community, though it is possible to discern parallels with key concepts in Buddhist philosophy.

The Mauryan state actively promoted the extension of agriculture and in many cases sponsored extensive irrigation projects. Furthermore the state was instrumental in introducing more wide-ranging systems of commercial exchange and in some instances facilitating the mobility of labour. A meticu-lous system for the assessment and collection of revenue existed and most commercial and productive activities were taxed, at least in theory. The *Artha-sastra*, the text most frequently used to reconstruct Mauryan political and economic practices, lists superintendents of goldsmiths and gold, storehouses, commerce, forest produce, the armoury, measures and weights, tolls, agricul-ture, weaving, prostitution, liquor, ships, slaughterhouses, cows, horses, ele-phants, chariots, infantry, passports, and the city.[32]

The Mauryan empire under Asoka was involved in extensive communica-tion with the world beyond the confines of the subcontinent as attested by

records of missions sent to the Hellenistic kingdoms, with which there were trade relations.[33]

Despite, or perhaps because of, its expanse and ambition, the Mauryan Empire was short lived. Asoka's reign lasted for thirty-seven years and after his death a period of decline rapidly set in, perhaps because Asoka's propagation of Buddhism alienated politically powerful Brahman communities, while his adhesion to non-violence may have weakened the army and rendered the state vulnerable.

Nonetheless, this period paved the way for other empires by opening up the subcontinent: the extensive building of roads enabled easier contact with more remote areas.[34]

The Kushanas: India, Rome, and China

After the Mauryan period, political developments in India became diffuse—involving a wide variety of polities, people, and time-frames. Romila Thapar speaks of a mosaic of political identities marked by the coexistence of various kinds of political systems: kingdoms, oligarchies, chieftainships, and republic-like tribal organizations. A constant and connecting feature in this diverse political and cultural landscape was the expansion and dynamism of systems of trade and exchange.[35]

In the north, the Kushana State (AD 100–300) covered a vast area extending from the western part of Central Asia to north India. It is not clear whether the ethnic origin of the Kushanas was Turkic, Mongolian, or Iranian, though it is commonly agreed that the empire was founded by the Yueh-Chih people, who had been displaced from Chinese Turkistan by the nomadic Hsiung-nu.[36] Kushana rulers imprinted their coins with images drawn from various religions and cultures, and legends were often bilingual in Greek and Prakrit. Kanishka, the pre-eminent Kushana ruler, used Greek legends, and deities shown on his coins range from Buddha and Shiva to the Persian gods Oado and Atash and the Sumerian goddess Nana.[37] This suggests that the Kushana rulers adopted a tolerant attitude towards religion in order to facilitate commercial exchange across a culturally diverse landscape and with other countries.[38]

Trading centres and connecting routes emerged in many parts of the sub-continent, some reaching into central and western Asia. Some of these were built on roads and networks established in Mauryan times, such as the highway from Taxila to Pataliputra, which was rebuilt and maintained up until the periods of the Afghan ruler Sher Shah, the Mughals, and the British, who referred to it as the Grand Trunk Road. The route is still used today and has been rebranded as India's National Highway No. 1.[39]

The Kushana period was instrumental in linking Indian and Chinese civilizations: the transmission of Buddhism from India to China was paralleled by extensive trade between the two countries. Indian traders also frequently functioned as middlemen in a luxury trade between China and the eastern Mediterranean and Byzantium.

The period saw the rise of a substantial mercantile community and the emergence of frequent and direct trade with Rome during the reign of Augustus (27 BC–AD 15), when various states of India sent envoys to the Roman Emperor. On the Indian side, spices, textiles, semi-precious stones, and ivory were traded primarily for high-value Roman coins as well as wine and coral. The Roman historian Pliny described the trade with India as a considerable drain on the income of Rome.[40] The thriving trade with Rome is believed to have led Indian merchants to expand trade to Southeast Asia, as items sought there were largely spices for the Roman market that were not as easily available in India. Meaningful Southeast Asian contacts with China and India date to the early centuries AD.

It could be said that India, both because of its geographical position and because of its economic enterprise, participated effectively in what was probably viewed in those times as almost a global trade of the early first millennium AD.[41]

Gupta India

The reign of the Gupta dynasty, starting from the accession of Chandra Gupta the first in about AD 319–20, approximated that of the Mauryan Empire in geographical terms up until the sixth century.

The Gupta era is an important reference point for the cultural self-image of Hindus and has often been referred to as the Classical Age of ancient India, due to the exceptionally high standard of living attained among urban upper classes. Advances in science and knowledge were centred either on Brahminical institutions and Buddhist monasteries or guilds specialized in particular crafts, such as metallurgy. Mathematics and astronomy were highly dynamic in this period. The decimal system of numerals had been in regular use among Indian astronomers since the fifth century. It was later introduced in Europe, where it eventually replaced Roman numerals and was known as the Arabic system of numerals.[42] Poetry and prose in Sanskrit were also heavily patronized by the ruling class and reached a high point, exemplified in the writings of Kalidasa, largely regarded as the pre-eminent author of classical Sanskrit literature.

While arts, scientific learning, and urban culture in general reached unprecedented levels in this period, it is nevertheless problematic to speak of a classical age for ancient India as a whole. In the Deccan and southern parts

of India it was the post-Gupta period that saw the rise of high civilization. It is the era of the Cholas (particularly around the ninth century AD) that is referred to as the 'classical period' in the south, due to impressive political, economic, cultural, and artistic development of the region during this time.

Having brought northern India under control, the Guptas eventually defeated the Shaka kingdoms in the west and thus gained access to trade with the Mediterranean, conducted from ports on the west coast. The Guptas also are believed to have received tribute from island inhabitants encircling the subcontinent, and possibly as far as Southeast Asia, where large Indian colonies and trading stations had developed. Indeed, Indian merchants in this period increasingly relied on and expanded trade with Southeast Asia, since trade with Rome, which had created considerable fortunes in earlier times, had come to an end in the third century AD with the Hun invasion of the Roman Empire. Though the Gupta Empire was able to withstand initial attacks by the Huns, the empire weakened under successive waves of attacks and Gupta power began to give way to smaller kingdoms by the end of the fifth century when the Huns broke into northern India successfully.

In this period, Buddhism spread to many parts of Asia, largely due to increased trading relationships and commercial networks. Large numbers of Indian Buddhists visited China, where Buddhism was declared the state religion in AD 379. In turn, Chinese Buddhists were interested in gaining access to original Buddhist scriptures and a number of them, most notably Fa Hsien, Hsuang Tsuang, and I Tsing, travelled extensively in India between AD 400 and 700. The cultural exchange developed alongside an expansion of maritime trade between China and south India. Sizeable Indian merchant colonies resided at Canton. Indian influence was also evident in Thailand, Java, and Cambodia.

The Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, and the emergence of Indo-Islamic culture

The entry of Islam into India gave rise to a unique Indo-Islamic cultural tradition, which represents an impressive process of adjustment and interaction between Islam and local traditions, in the process establishing strong Indian political, economic, and cultural ties to Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula.[43]

Early contact between Islamic and Indic groups developed in northwestern India when the first Ummayid Caliph, Muawiya, and Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh in AD 712. Trade with India was vital for the Islamic world (due to its wealth in gold bullion, its export surplus, and its location at the centre of an early Indian Ocean-wide economy stretching from China to the Levant, or eastern Mediterranean) and large numbers of Arab traders settled on

India's western coast from the eighth century onwards.[44] Their presence being primarily motivated by commercial considerations, early Arab settlers did not attempt large-scale religious conversion.

The large-scale political and economic expansion of Islam in India occurred only from the turn of the eleventh century onwards, when Muhammad Ghuri defeated the Rajput Prithviraj Chauhan, thereby paving the way for the establishment of the first Muslim Sultanate by Qutubuddin Aibak with Delhi as its capital. For the Sultans of Delhi, as later for the Mughals, expansion of Muslim power was aimed primarily at the acquisition of new territories and not at religious conversion. The majority of their subjects throughout remained non-Muslim and their core institutions were not specifically 'Islamic' in nature.[45] 'The sultans themselves were not religious leaders. Like non-Muslim rulers in India, they did not gain their authority through their own holiness or sacred learning but through military prowess and skill in governing.'[46] Though the supremacy of Sharia law was upheld, it was not imposed on the non-Muslim population.

The early court at Delhi was modelled after the Sassanid court of Persia and its military and administrative culture relied on the Turkish institution of elite military slavery.[47] The state structure was composed of a mixture of pre-existing Indian forms and political experiments in West Asia.[48]

At the height of its power by the fourteenth century, the frontiers of the Delhi Sultanate were almost coeval with the contours of the modern nation state.[49] However, in keeping with earlier patterns of political development, by the fifteenth century, independent Sultanates, each with their own wider contact networks, emerged in Kashmir, Bengal, and Gujarat and—in the era following the attack of Timur (Tamerlane) on Delhi in 1398—more widely.[50] Thereafter, Delhi is best viewed as one among a number of regional Sultanates.

Throughout this period, a distinct Indo-Islamic culture developed in northern India, marked by strong Turko-Persian influence.[51] The Delhi Sultanate gave rise to a period of Indian cultural renaissance, leaving lasting monuments in architecture, music, literature, and religion, and innovations in ruling institutions as well as in the fields of political theory, literary and religious styles, and distinctive cultural traditions in law. Urban growth and road networks were developed that encouraged trade within the region as well as with the outside world.[52]

South India too became subject to Islamic influence, after the decline of the Cholas (by the thirteenth century).[53] Under the reign of the sultan of Delhi, Alauddin Khilji, a Muslim polity known as the Bahamani Sultanate was set up in the south, extending to Madurai. However, within a few years of this, an independent Hindu kingdom was founded at Vijayanagar. The Vijayanagar kingdom soon established its hegemony over the whole southern peninsula, making it the most extensive kingdom in the subcontinent.[54] It controlled the

spice trade of the south as well as the cotton trade of the southeast and numerous accounts by European travellers speak of the splendour and wealth of this kingdom.[55]

After 1526, the emerging Mughal Empire absorbed the Delhi Sultanate. Its founder Zahiruddin Babar gained control of the Delhi region by defeating Ibrahim Lodi, the last of the Delhi Sultans at Panipat. Babar was a descendent of Timur and of Genghis Khan. (The term Mughal is a reference to Babar's Mongol ancestry and gained currency only in the nineteenth century.) Babar's son Humayun, forced into exile, took refuge in the Safavid court of Persia, and reclaimed his authority with Persian help in 1555. Humayun's son Akbar, the greatest of the Mughals, reinforced the administrative structures he found in place and reigned for half a century, having led successful campaigns against Gujarat and Bengal, thereby gaining control over the richest parts of the subcontinent, agriculturally and commercially. He later extended Mughal control into Kabul, Kashmir, Orissa, and Baluchisthan, creating the Mughal Empire. The territorial expanse of the empire continued to grow under his successors Jahangir (1605–27), Shah Jahan (1627–58), and Aurang-zeb (1658–1707).

The expansion and consolidation of the Mughal Empire was roughly coter-minous with two other great Muslim empires, the Safavid in Iran and the Ottoman Empire based in Turkey and controlling much of West Asia and northern Africa. The Mughal Empire exceeded both in terms of population, wealth, and power. In 1700, the population of Mughal India is estimated to have been roughly 100 million, five times that of the Ottoman Empire and twenty times that of Safavid Persia.[56] Unlike the Ottoman and Safavid em-pires, the majority of Mughal India's subjects were non-Muslim. Akbar, who established the structural foundations of the empire, was highly sensitive to this fact and built on the Sultanate policy of encouraging a diverse and inclusive ruling elite. A considerable part of the nobility at the court consisted of Turks, Afghans, Arabs, and Persians as well as locally born Muslims, and powerful non-Muslim indigenous groups, such as the Rajputs, a number of Brahmans, and later the Marathas. In order to build alliance networks and establish links with powerful Rajput clans, Akbar established the custom of taking Rajput wives, who were not expected to convert. Akbar's efforts at constructing an Indo-Islamic empire based on principles of public tolerance are reflected in the flexibility and eclecticism of his private belief system. In 1582 Akbar announced his personal adherence to a new faith that he termed Din-e-Ilahi, or Divine Faith, that drew on strains of both Hindu and Muslim mystical traditions and was also influenced by Zoroastrianism. Never-theless, Akbar made no attempts to impose it as a state religion.[57]

The political and economic success of Akbar and his successors can be accounted for to a large extent by administrative reforms he initiated, building

on precedents set by the Sultans before him. Throughout the empire, nobles and powerful groups were incorporated into the imperial structure through the award of *mansabs*, imperial ranks that were demarcated decimally and that designated the number of armed forces that the individual was to provide to the centre. Accordingly, nobles were assigned *jagirs*, or the right to collect tax revenue over designated pieces of land. Such assignments were not hereditary and were frequently rotated, thus preventing nobles from building regional powerbases that could challenge Mughal authority. Mughal officials typically would negotiate for the delivery of revenue through local chieftains and landholders who homogeneously came to be referred to as zamindars.[58] Thus, the agrarian surplus was distributed amongst various layers of society.

New commercial and political elites emerged, due to the increased monetization and economic expansion under Mughal rule, especially during the seventeenth century. Though the Mughal Empire was primarily agrarian in nature, it was involved in long distance overland and oceanic trade and increasingly relied on revenue from textile exports as much as from rural, essentially agricultural, activities. Indeed, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards the character of the empire became increasingly mercantilist and linked with the international economy. The economic prosperity of the Mughal Empire was heavily reliant on oceanic connections, though unlike the Ottomans, the Mughals never commanded a substantial navy, a circumstance that allowed Europeans gradually to gain control over sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean.

South India

South India is too often slighted in historical accounts, in spite of its varied and rich civilizations and its striking contributions to the subcontinent, including major economic ones today. While glancing references have been made to south India in the paragraphs above, the ones that follow aim to provide some flow to its place in wider India's history at the risk of disrupting the overall chronological nature of this chapter.

Recorded history begins in south India as in the north, with the advent of the Aryans. The process of Aryanization, spread over a long period of seven to eight centuries, saw extensive interaction of south India with lands both to the west and the east. The period of Mauryan Empire in the north was accompanied and followed in the south by the rule of the Satavahanas which lasted until the second century AD. Under the Satavahanas, Buddhism flourished in the south, though Brahminism was favoured by most Satavahana rulers. Their kingdom was eventually partitioned between the Abhiras in the northwest, Chutus in the south, and Ikshvakus in Andhradesa.[59] From the

mid-sixth century, for about 300 years the history of south India is that of three major kingdoms in conflict with each other: the Chalukyas of Badami, Pallavas of Kanchipuram (who have attracted the most attention from historians), and Pandyas of Madurai.[60] The Pallavas were involved in naval warfare (at a time of conflict with the Chalukyas) to support their ally, the King of Sri Lanka; this interaction between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka was but a continuation of past history and the future pattern of relations.[61] This period saw the settlement on the Malabar and Konkan coasts of Arab traders, who kept the trade with the Roman Empire alive. These traders were welcomed, given land for trading stations, and left free to practise their religion.[62]

Around the ninth century, the Cholas emerged as the dominant power in the south, introducing an era of impressive political, economic, cultural, and artistic development. The Cholas aimed to establish trade supremacy on the high seas and attacked an alliance between the Cheras and Pandyas to break their monopoly on trade with West Asia, bringing Malabar under their control. They also sought to eliminate Arab competition in Southeast Asian trade and launched an ambitious campaign against the kingdom of Shrivijaya, a powerful maritime state that ruled the Malayan peninsula, Sumatra, Java, and controlled the sea routes from India to China.[63] The Chola monarchs sent embassies to China and by the tenth century, merchants in China and south India had established trading relationships.[64]

However, by the latter part of the twelfth century, Chola ascendency had begun to wane. The power of subordinate rulers in the Deccan increased as central control weakened. Frequent military campaigns exhausted Chola resources, and, coupled with a challenge from the Hoysalas in the west and the Pandyas in the south, ultimately led to the fall of the Cholas in the thirteenth century. The region continued to attract foreigners and during this period Jewish traders established settlements on the eastern coast of Kerala for trade. (Subsequent to the persecution of Jews in Europe in later centuries, some would come to Kerala, already familiar from trading contacts.)[65]

The collapse of Vijayanagar in the sixteenth century spelt the end of the south as a separate political arena, with the period following it characterized by extensive warfare among numerous indigenous political entities of the peninsula, culminating in the brilliant expansion of the Mysore state of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan.[66] The warfare was exacerbated by the intrusion of powers from outside the region such as the Marathas, the Mughals, the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the French and British in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[67] Despite the continuing struggle for power, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries the region lay at the core of an international textile trade, stretching from Southeast Asia to Europe.[68] Eventually, British power in alliance with Hyderabad ruled south India and Mysore was absorbed as a princely State.

Enter the Europeans

Even prior to the establishment of the Mughal Empire, the Portuguese under Vasco da Gama had landed on India's southwestern coast and had begun to establish major settlements in Goa in 1510. Nevertheless, the Portuguese were never able to consolidate a monopoly over Indian Ocean sea trade—the bulk of the trade still being conducted by Arab and Gujarati merchant communities. Even in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Portuguese trading outposts were considerably less important than the Mughal port city of Surat. The Ottoman navy ensured that the Portuguese were never able to close the Red Sea to Persian, Turkish, Arab, and Indian trade. Early on, the English, who had succeeded the Portuguese as the major European sea power in the Indian Ocean, were also supplicants of the Mughal Empire and could only engage in trade with the permission of the Mughal emperor. The East India Company, which was formed in 1600, had to obtain permission from Emperor Jahangir to trade in India in 1619. But this was soon to change.

The Raj in India

Interpretation of the backdrop against which British domination of the Indian subcontinent developed is much disputed. The period prior to the British conquest of large parts of India was seen by nineteenth-century European historians as a period of 'anarchy between the age of Mughal hegemony and the imposition of pax Britannica'.[69] However, it is important 'in any study of India between empires not to confuse the erosion of power of the Mughal court and army with a more general political, economic and societal decline'.[70] Indian politics in the eighteenth century were marked primarily by decentralization rather than decline. The economy was generally buoyant, driven by agriculture, inland trade, and urbanization. Decline in agricultural prosperity due to interstate warfare in some areas of northern India, Punjab, and Maratha-controlled territories was counterbalanced by extensive growth in other regions such as Mysore under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan. 'States exacted tribute from systems of agricultural commodity production that tied villages to expansive networks of commercial mobility and exchange.' It was 'this vibrant "tributary commercialism"...which made India look attractive to European companies'.[71]

The gradual dismantling of the Mughal successor states and replacement by British domination began in the mid-eighteenth century. Until 1757, European traders had been forced to bring large amount of bullion into India, as Indian cotton and silk products had a well-established market in Europe, whereas no significant Indian demand existed for Western products. This pattern of exchange began to evolve following the British conquest of Bengal

between the 1750s and 1760s, when the East India Company, which had initially approached India with a charter to trade, began to set up an elaborate state apparatus to govern the appropriation of land revenue in its Indian territories that was in turn invested in the purchase of products for export to European markets.[72] Thus the East India Company, an organization that had originally been intended to accumulate profits from oceanic trade, came to draw its basic sustenance from land revenue.[73]

British involvement in India and eventually its appropriation of the subcontinent as the crown jewel of its global empire is best viewed as an economic project. From this perspective, British exploitation in India can be divided into three successive phases.[74] These phases often overlapped, with older forms of exploitation never being entirely replaced but rather integrated into newer patterns.[75]

The first 'mercantilist' phase, from 1757 up to 1813, was characterized by direct plunder and the East India Company's monopoly trade. Surplus revenues were used to purchase Indian finished goods (mostly from Bengal) at below market prices for export to England and Europe.

The second phase of exploitation was marked by the establishment of a classical pattern of colonialism, in which India had become a captive market for manufactured goods from the metropolis while exporting, initially mainly to it, a variety of raw materials, such as cotton, jute, tea, coffee, wheat, and oil seeds. The patterns of trade had changed drastically with the Industrial Revolution in England. Between 1813 and 1858 India was converted into a market for Manchester textiles and a source for raw materials. Traditional handicrafts consequently suffered a sharp decline. Between 1870 and 1914, India's export surplus was critical for Britain's balance of payments, since growing protectionism in America and Continental Europe made it increasingly difficult for Britain to sell its manufactured goods in those markets, while it needed to import a variety of agricultural commodities. The export of Indian raw materials to America and Europe was indispensable for financing Britain's deficit with them.[76]

The third phase, beginning from the second half of the nineteenth century, saw the establishment of finance-driven dominance through the export of capital and the establishment of sizeable chains of British-controlled banks, export-import firms, and agency houses. This period also witnessed a dramatic increase in the so-called 'country trade' between India, the Eastern Archipelago, and China, which had first set in towards the end of the eighteenth century, bringing about a 'commercial revolution' in the Indian Ocean.[77] These developments resulted in profound changes in the economic life of lands bordering on the India and China Seas, from Basra and Mocha in the west to Malacca and Canton in the east. The economic orientation of the East

India Company underwent a number of far-reaching changes from the first decades of the nineteenth century onwards.

The Charter Act of 1813 ended the East India Company's monopoly of trade with India due to pressure from a newly emergent industrial capitalist class in Britain, which effectively advocated a doctrine of free trade in order to sell products in Eastern markets. China tea now took the place of Indian textiles as the Company's most profitable item of trade. As in the case of early British trade with India, the Chinese demand for British goods at the time was negligible.[78]

Though British goods did not find a market in China, a solution to Britain's negative balance of trade with China was found when it was discovered that products of British India, mainly raw cotton and later opium, could find a ready market in China. India's resources were now used to finance British investment in China and the purchase of tea and silk at Canton.[79] After 1823, opium replaced Indian cotton as the primary staple commodity in this trade. A considerable part of the surplus of Indian revenues was sent to London in teas from China.[80] In 1830, the Auditor-General of the Company T. C. Melville declared, 'I am prepared to say that India does entirely depend upon the profits of the China trade'.[81] Until the 1920s, 20 per cent of India's revenue was generated through the opium trade. Amitav Ghosh speculates, 'this export of contraband may have incalculably influenced the way the Chinese perceive India'.[82]

Throughout, land revenue remained the single largest source of income for the British East India Company and then the Raj. Receipts increased between 1881 and 1901, despite devastating famines in 1890, due to high and inflexible colonial demands for land revenue.[83] Famines became a frequent feature of life in colonial India, while the first seven decades of the eighteenth century, the period prior to the establishment of British colonial administration, were remarkably free of famines. The great Bengal famine of 1770, in which one-third of the population is thought to have perished, occurred soon after the colonial conquest.

The bureaucratic foundation of the Raj

The Company relied heavily on two institutions of state in India. One was its massive standing army and the other was the centralized civilian bureaucracy in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Though formal control was to be exercised by the Board of Directors of the East Asia Company in London, the Governor General and his bureaucrats enjoyed considerable autonomy. Until well into the twentieth century, the British government in India functioned essentially as an autocracy of hierarchically organized officials headed by the Viceroy in India and the Secretary of State (a member of the Cabinet)

in London. Parliamentary control from the metropolis was by and large theoretical.[84]

In spite of a patina of benevolence, on occasion combined with talk of trusteeship and training towards eventual self-governance, the Raj was in reality uncompromisingly white, authoritarian (particularly after the 1857 uprising), and driven by economic considerations for the benefit of Britain. It existed primarily to safeguard colonial exploitation of India's economic and human resources. All higher levels of administration were occupied by Europeans, who held all but sixteen of the 900 posts in the Indian civil service in the early 1880s.[85]

The British Indian Army

The British government in India relied heavily on an army that it frequently employed in campaigns outside India in order to crush resistance movements and consolidate control, such as: the 1882 campaign by Prime Minister Gladstone in Egypt; the campaign against the Mahdi and his movement in Sudan in 1885–6 and again in 1896; and the 'Boxer war' in China in 1900. Army expenditure accounted for 41.9 per cent of the Indian Government budget in 1881–2 and rose to 51.9 per cent by 1904–5.[86]

British military policy provides a number of insights into the nature of colonial rule. After the shock of the rebellion of 1857, the army became one-third white, with a European monopoly over artillery. The Indian sector of the army was equipped with inferior weaponry and was strictly divided along religious and ethnic fault lines, an approach that Sir John Strachey described as a 'policy of water-tight compartments . . . to prevent the growth of any dangerous identity of feeling from race, religion, caste or local sympathies'.[87] Or, as Sir Charles Wood, the second Secretary of State, put it in 1862: 'I wish to have a different and rival spirit in different regiments, so that Sikh might fire into Hindoo, Goorkha into either, without any scruples in time of need.'[88]

From the 1880s onwards, an ideology of 'martial races' was strictly adhered to under Lord Roberts. Men belonging to particular racial and ethnic communities in India were said to be better suited for soldiering than others, which justified the large scale recruitment of Sikhs and Gorkhas, religiously and ethnically relatively marginal groups who were therefore less likely to be affected by mainstream nationalism.[89]

Similar divisions were encouraged among the civilian population and especially among Indian elite groups, predominantly along religious lines but in many cases along the lines of caste or regional identities. This was partially the result of deliberate efforts by the British administration, with consequences that echo in Indian society and politics up to this day.

The introduction of elected municipalities with separate electorates increased tensions between Hindus and Muslims and forced community leaders to cultivate a constituency among their own religious community. On the whole, colonial administrators regarded communal divisions as politically useful, though at times tensions between religious communities could also pose law and order challenges. Secretary of State Hamilton's confidential letter to Lord Elgin in May 1897 typifies British attitudes in this regard:

> I am sorry to hear of the increasing friction between Hindus and Mohammedans in the North West and the Punjab. One hardly knows what to wish for; unity of ideas and action would be very dangerous politically, divergence of ideas and collision are administratively troublesome. Of the two, the latter is the least risky, though it throws anxiety and responsibility upon those on the spot where the friction exists.[90]

Meanwhile, the economic drain of wealth from India to Britain, as well as the disruption by the British of Indian cultural traditions, helped fuel the rise of nationalism among Indians, as did British racism.[91] Racial discrimination and brutality could on occasion unite higher and lower classes of native society across lines of religion and caste in a shared sense of injustice. The upper echelons of native society frequently encountered discrimination and barriers to promotion in jobs or professions for which they were often well qualified. Compartments of railways and steamers were often reserved exclusively for Europeans. For the less privileged, racism often took on cruder shapes in the form of outright physical violence, sometimes in the guise of 'shooting accidents', with European-dominated courts usually awarding insultingly light sentences to the offenders.[92] Colour played a crucial role in uniting white businessmen in India against potential Indian competition. Innumerable personal and 'club-life' business ties existed between white businessmen and government officials in India. As Lord Curzon pointed out in a speech at Barakar in 1903: 'My work lies in administration, yours in exploitation; but both are aspects of the same question and of the same duty.'[93]

Anti-colonialism, the 1857 uprising, and the birth of nationalism

In 1857, a large-scale military mutiny and civilian uprising seriously challenged colonial rule in India. Colonial officials and historians have described the events of 1857 as a sepoy mutiny,[94] whereas Indian nationalist historiography has often referred to them as 'the first war of independence'. It was both. The revolt was clearly infused with a sense of patriotism, often regionally focused, and aimed at putting an end to colonial rule. Whereas earlier cases of military and civilian revolts had largely been uncoordinated and localized, the 1857 uprising for the first time saw the convergence of multiple strands of

resistance. Discontented landed magnates across north India and peasants, tribal communities, as well as artisans, labourers, and rebellious policemen joined forces. The agrarian revolts were thus multi-class in character and at times influenced by religion. Though Hindu religious sentiment did not play a significant role in the rebellion, Muslim religious millenarianism was a constant and crucial factor. However, while many Muslim leaders called for a Jihad against the colonial government, insurgent leaders took care to preserve Hindu and Muslim unity and to emphasize the common threat faced by both.[95]

Though the revolt enjoyed a wide social base, it eventually failed for a number of reasons. Rebel forces were not quick enough to attack British troops advancing from Punjab and further failed to consolidate their control over liberated zones by establishing their own administration that the population could have viewed as legitimate and deserving of support. Furthermore, the politics of the revolt reflected inter-Indian rivalries. Hyderabad, for instance, did not throw its full weight behind the revolt, as it had no interest in seeing rival Maratha power re-establish itself in its immediate neighbourhood.[96]

It took fifty million pounds—and hideous brutality—to quell the mutiny and the East India Company was abolished in its aftermath. India now came under the direct governance of the crown in Britain. Rather typically of India's fate under British influence and then rule, the cost for suppressing the 1857 uprising was included in the Indian debt, which the new crown Raj had to pay back to London as part of its annual Home Charges.

However, these events were pregnant with consequence, some positive, as Ramachandra Guha makes clear:

> To focus on the Raj simply as a vehicle of economic exploitation is one-sided. As Karl Marx pointed out, while the British conquered India through the vilest of motives, they were yet an unconscious tool of history in waking up a moribund civilization. They gave us a wake-up call which was salutary. Indian traditions of nationalism and social reform were a direct product of the provocations and challenges of colonial rule.[97]

Anti-colonial mass mobilization and the emergence of nationalism

The 1857 revolt saw then the convergence of diverse elements of resistance to colonial rule and the emergence of anti-colonial consciousness among broad sections of India's population.

In the past, in discussing the history of anti-colonialism and Indian nationalism, disproportionate attention has often been accorded to the workings of

the Western-educated elite. However, anti-colonialism and nationalism in India always had a highly pluralistic character and meant different things to different people. Indeed, the formation of an overarching Indian national movement always had to contend with the need to incorporate a variety of religious communities and linguistic regions and to accommodate a number of contradictory impulses under its umbrella.

While subaltern anti-colonialism clearly predated attempts at mass mobilization against British rule led by urban elites,[98] educated Indians had been forming political associations at regional levels and the Indian National Congress (INC), initially an association of city-based professionals, came into being in 1885.

Until 1920, the Congress remained the preserve of educated groups, predominantly high-caste Hindus.[99] They alone were equipped to engage with the Raj within the existing channels of political manoeuvre and they alone were sufficiently qualified to profit from concessions to place and power in government service or Legislative Councils.[100]

Early INC leadership was moderate in its aims and dedicated to advancing its claims through the path of petitions, with the primary aim of greater Indianization of the administration. On the economic front, it developed a critique of a wide spectrum of colonial policies, ranging from the devastating famines brought about by colonial taxes, to the use of indentured Indian labour at home and on plantations overseas.

Only modest success attended these early attempts to extract concessions from the colonial administration, and by the mid-1890s a new generation of nationalists began to question the moderate approach and call for more assertive measures. The following years saw the beginning of 'no-revenue' campaigns and protests directed against countervailing excise duty imposed on Indian cotton in 1896. The period also saw the first targeted assassinations of colonial officials.

The controversial partition of Bengal in 1905 provided further fuel for various strands of Indian resistance, provoking the beginning of the *swadeshi* (own country) movement, which emphasized the boycotting of British-made goods in favour of Indian ones. The move to partition, a prelude to the 1947 creation of Pakistan and the 1971 emergence of an independent Bangladesh, was aimed at dividing the population along religious lines, since the professed objective was to create a separate Muslim majority province in eastern Bengal with Dhaka as its capital.[101] Due to widespread agitation, the partition of Bengal had to be annulled by 1911 and the British shifted their capital from Calcutta to Delhi, partly in order to operate from a less hostile political environment.

The agitation against the partition of Bengal served to unify moderate and extremist strands around a common cause. The mass nationalist movement

that had begun to take shape towards the very end of the nineteenth century gained considerable momentum in the 1920s due to the social and economic dislocation brought about by the First World War, during which Indian manpower and treasure were critical to the British endeavour. The war had impacted upon Indian lives through massive recruitments, heavy taxes, and often semi-compulsory war loans, as well as a sharp increase in prices. This served to extend the national movement to business groups, large sections of the peasantry, and industrial labour.

The war years had witnessed a massive plunder of Indian human and material resources.[102] Large amounts of grain and raw material were extracted and diverted in order to meet army needs. Defence expenditure increased by 300 per cent, bringing about significant changes in the entire financial structure of the Raj. Apart from land revenue and land tax, trade and industry were significantly affected for the first time. It was this that drew large numbers of Indian merchants, companies, and business families to the national movement. The post-war years thus saw a combination of growing grievances with a new mood of self-confidence: 'the classical formula for a potentially revolutionary situation'.[103]

In retrospect, the end of the Raj was largely ordained by the First World War, which weakened Britain and brought about broad challenges to the earlier world order and which also forced significant change on Britain's imperial arrangements in India.

Colonial policy towards Indian industrial development underwent change due to financial demands from London and the realization that a certain amount of Indian economic self-sufficiency was a strategic necessity.[104] As a result, the development of the Indian private sector accelerated and contributed to country-wide nationalist connections. The mass political awakening of the post-war years also owed something to a worldwide upsurge of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist sentiment. Indian soldiers returning home from campaigns in distant regions are likely to have carried with them a sense of these international currents.[105]

It became increasingly difficult for the colonial state to service the needs of the metropolis while at the same time meeting the political and economic requirements of the administration of India. Furthermore, the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s damaged India's export surplus with the rest of the world, through which the transfer of wealth from the colony to Britain had been channelled.[106] Thus, in order to continue to transfer wealth from the colony to the metropolis, Britain had to resort to tactics, including exchange rate manipulation, that favoured the requirement for the colonial government to meet its obligatory home charges but resulted in British disinvestment within India.[107] The agrarian distress that ensued would prove to be

a major impetus to the mass movements of the 1920s and 1930s led by M. K. Gandhi.

Gandhi returned from South Africa (where he had gained valuable political experience through his organization of non-violent protests by South Africa's Indian expatriate community against racist policies) to India in 1915 at a time when the constitutionalism assumed by the moderate leadership in pursuit of its demands for change had not been able to achieve any major concessions, and methods of individual revolutionary violence and armed insurrections during the First World War had been suppressed to a large extent.

According to Partha Chatterjee, it was 'the Gandhian intervention in elite-nationalist politics in India which established for the first time that an authentic national movement could only be built upon organized support of the whole of the peasantry'.[108]

Gandhian ideology and rhetoric situated themselves outside of the nationalist dilemma of the urban elite and drew political and moral authority from a profound moral critique of colonial rule. In 1909, Gandhi published *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule), which contained a strong critique not only of British rule in India but of modern industrial civilization and the Western conception of civil society as a whole. It was almost instantly banned in British India. Gandhi's critical evaluation of Western industrialism and political institutions resonated deeply among large sections of Indians, ruined as much by factories as by courts of law.[109] Though some have interpreted Gandhi's utopian vision for society as a commonwealth of independent village republics as little more than idealism, they have overlooked the potency of Gandhi as an astute political strategist. He drew immense moral and political authority from his critique of the Raj and it was this that assured success for his nationwide mass agitations around strategic issues. Gandhism was a powerful political weapon.

Widespread disaffection in the second decade of the twentieth century provided Gandhi with a platform to launch his first 'all India' agitation. Initial protests were based on opposition to the Rowlatt Act, which perpetuated wartime ordinances into peacetime, and allowed Indians to be held without trial. This agitation gained considerable momentum when it merged with the Khilafat movement, the latter chiefly concerned with harsh conditions that were to be imposed on the defeated Ottoman Empire and demanding that the Turkish Sultan (*Khalifa*) should retain control over Muslim sacred places, be left with sufficient territory to effectively defend Islamic faith, and that Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine remain under Muslim sovereignty.[110] Though the Khilafat movement was ostensibly concerned with events that occurred outside India and did not directly affect Indian domestic politics, it effected the large-scale mobilization of India's vast and highly diverse Muslim community. Like the rest of India's population, its Muslim community was

divided along regional, linguistic, class, and sectarian fault lines and required a pan-Islamic symbol for effective political mobilization. In its second phase, to a large extent due to Gandhi's efforts and political acumen, the movement reached beyond the Muslim community to become an important symbol in the struggle against imperialism. For Khilafat leaders, Gandhi's support provided an essential link with Hindu politicians, without which any non-cooperation movement and boycott of British institutions and products would have been ineffective.[111] For Gandhi, the support of Khilafat agitation proved helpful in generating popular mobilization that transcended the boundaries of religious communities.[112]

The Rowlatt agitation of 1919 proved to be the largest anti-imperialist movement India had witnessed since 1857 and it was met with brutal repression. On 13 April 1919, an unarmed crowd of villagers that had gathered in Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar was fired upon by British soldiers under the command of General Dyer, killing 370 and injuring more than 1,200 men, women, and children. The Jallianwallah Bagh massacre inspired a yet more fervent nationalist response.

The non-cooperation movements led by Gandhi were accompanied by widespread labour unrest and peasant movements occurring between 1919 and 1922, independent of Congress politics.[113] However, at its height the non-cooperation movement was abruptly called off by Gandhi after twenty-two policemen were killed by angry peasants at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur district. His decision was deeply resented by the Congress leadership and in the following years, Hindu–Muslim unity at the height of the Khilafat movement gave way to increased tension and cases of violence between religious communities. Its aftermath saw the rise of religiously informed identity politics among Muslims and more aggressive forms of religious nationalism by Hindu organizations. The antecedents of these developments doubtless include the granting of separate electorates by the British for Muslims in 1909. Thus, the 1920s saw a splintering of the nationalist movement into various strands. However, it is important to remember that unlike in Europe, where concepts of nationalism had been inspired by the Enlightenment and Romanticism and had thrived in an economic environment of industrial capitalism to gradually transform dynastic empires into democratic nation states, nationalism in Africa and Asia was essentially a product of anti-colonial resistance movements. Unlike in Europe, sovereignty was not conceptualized as centralized absolute power, but rather as in the Mughal Empire and many Indian ruling structures, shared with the periphery. Borders were often porous and 'generalised cartographic anxiety over territorial possession' was new to the area and was spread only through colonialism.[114] Nevertheless, once religious

communities as political entities came into being, this cartographic anxiety was bound to become a constant feature of politics in the subcontinent.

In 1930, the global depression and profound economic crisis provided the basis for a revitalization of the mass nationalist agitations and the launching of Gandhi's Civil Disobedience campaigns. However, a wide range of conflict along the lines of class, caste, and religious communities also gained strength. In 1930, Gandhi selected the tax on the indigenous production of salt as a platform for yet another nationwide agitation and undertook his famous salt march to the coast of central India, triggering large-scale boycotts of British goods and institutions.

Gandhi had been invited to attend a 'Round Table' conference touching on India's future in London, but upon his return without substantial concessions from the British, the Civil Disobedience movement was resumed in 1932 and was once again met with extreme repression by the colonial administration. The hostility and condescension of some of the UK's elite for India and Indians during the first half of the twentieth century, even as India's eventual independence loomed, is encapsulated in Winston Churchill's famously visceral dislike of the country, its people, and its traditions.[115]

The beginning of the Second World War saw unprecedented economic intervention by the British and the diversion, once more, of Indian resources to finance Britain's war effort. Serious shortages developed and prices for essential commodities soared. Large-scale deprivation resulted. Most dramatically, in Bengal a devastating famine occurred in 1943–4 in which between 3.5 and 3.8 million people starved to death in one of the most catastrophic and least publicized hecatombs of the era. According to recent research, no significant decline in aggregate availability of food had occurred in the province. The high rate of mortality was caused by a severe decline in exchange entitlements of vulnerable social groups and the striking absence of relief measures.[116]

In 1942 Gandhi issued a more radical resolution for the British to Quit India and in a sharp contrast to his earlier stance, stated in an interview that he was 'prepared to take the risk of violence' in order to end 'the great calamity of slavery'.[117] The Quit India movement overshadowed the agitations of the 1920s and represented the largest uprising in India since 1857, no less significant for being civilian. Since the entire top leadership of Congress had been imprisoned, the movement was led and coordinated by lower-ranking Congress leaders (who were often of a decidedly socialist bent). In a number of districts, British administration collapsed. A significant political development, though one of only limited military consequence, was the creation in 1942 of the Indian National Army, allied with Japan and dedicated to ending British rule in India.

The political unity of the remarkably successful Quit India movement degenerated into serious divisions among Indian political actors over the political dispensation after independence. Mistrust and tensions grew between Congress and the Muslim League, intermediated erratically by the British colonial administration (which in hindsight seems also to have intentionally created and even encouraged the growing difference). A series of intrigues, policy initiatives, and misfires led to the partition of India along professed religious lines in 1947 at the time of independence, producing one of the most cataclysmic events of the twentieth century. An estimated three million Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims lost their lives in the violence that ensued. Nine million Hindus and Sikhs were displaced from the region that was to become Pakistan and an estimated six million Indian Muslims migrated to Pakistan. These circumstances were particularly unhappy ones as India sought to assume a leading place at the international level; and their sequelae, notably in Kashmir, would bedevil Indian foreign policy in subsequent decades.

India's foreign relations, while controlled completely by Britain, had increasingly assumed an Indian face since the Versailles peace conference of 1919, at which London was successful in securing a seat for (British) India—in effect providing Britain with a second seat—occupied by the elegant but submissive Maharajah of Bikaner, while Indian nationalists, clamouring for access, were kept at bay from the meeting.[118] This led on to Indian membership in the League of Nations (where India's delegation was headed by a succession of Britons) and to founding membership of the United Nations even before India's independence. Britain also included Indian officials in some of its key diplomatic institutions, notably its embassy in Washington, where Indian economic interests were recognized as relevant.[119]

The following chapters will address the emergence of an independent Indian foreign policy under Jawaharlal Nehru (long a leader of the INC at Gandhi's side, although one with a distinctly more patrician background and outlook), how it was influenced by India's earlier history and the colonial era, and how some steps adopted under colonial rule to provide India with an international identity, albeit largely self-serving ones for London, had prepared the ground for India's emergence as a meaningful player in global diplomacy.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to highlight the proposition that today's concept of India is not timeless, static, and self-evident. In contrast, it is a product of historical processes, whether with regard to its geographical boundaries,

broad political and economic structures, or social categories such as caste and religious identity that continue to have great political import. In interpreting Indian politics, it is helpful to keep the historicity of political categories in mind. Often social and political forces that disguise themselves as traditional are as new and as much a product of modernity as those that self-consciously and overtly assert their modernity. Contending interpretations of the past are a decisive factor in virtually all current political debates especially with regard to economic and also foreign policy.

Thus, India's self-interpretation, its current borders, and its foreign policy preferences, while influenced by previous avatars, cannot be said to descend in a straight line from ancient history. India's borders, particularly in the north, were subject to constant shifts as migrant populations drifted into the region and foreign conquests occurred. Today's dominant religions and philosophies in India, some indigenous while others not, represent a very different mix than they would have one, two, or three thousand years ago. Likewise, the ethnic mosaic of India has undergone constant change. India's civilizational influence within Asia, from antiquity onwards, notably through the spread of both Buddhism and (on a lesser scale) Hinduism, and in many other fields through Persia onwards to the Middle East, has been vast and manifold.

Modern, independent India thus constitutes the core of a region that has interacted with the rest of the world for millennia, extending its cultural, intellectual, and religious influence far and wide, particularly to the east. 'Indianness' is instantly recognizable the world over. Indian trading communities have settled the world over, including along most of Africa's coastline and in the Americas, greatly enriching the make-up of many countries. The British gave India a new territorial unity. Gandhi and others in the national movement imparted a modern purpose to the people of India that continues to evolve in the twenty-first century.

Its colonial experience did much to diminish India relative to its standing in earlier eras. Its economy failed to progress during the two decisive centuries of British dominance, with the industrial revolution nearly entirely bypassing it, by design of London. India's economy represented only a fraction of the relative weight in the global economy in 1947 that it had two centuries earlier.[120]

Not surprisingly, this legacy, in spite of the success of the Quit India movement, left the newly independent state, still smarting from partition, looking for fresh approaches and new departures to establishing an international personality, and harbouring a deep, if sometimes suppressed, distrust for Great Britain (and by extension, much of the West, epitomized by the USA). At the same time, Indians have tended to be generous in their assessment of the more beneficial features of a Raj never primarily designed in their interests. They appreciate the institutions of governance, not least the Westminster

parliamentary system, and the independent judiciary, bequeathed to them by the British even as they register the enormous economic depredations of the colonial period.

Partition was to haunt India well into the future, complicating its relations, beyond Pakistan, with many other Muslim countries and also, to a degree, with its own Muslim communities. Further, the distrust of London, and by extension Washington and other Western capitals, combined with Nehru's choice of a broadly socialist model of economic development, precipitated India into an alliance with Moscow, an economic and foreign policy orientation that had turned into a dead end by the late 1980s, as ensuing chapters will explore.

In spite of these challenges, India's centrality in the South Asian subcontinent, its tradition throughout a very long history of engagement with the outside world and mostly of hospitality to inflowing populations (as today with Nepalis and, to a lesser extent, Bangladeshis moving into India in large numbers) have made it a naturally prominent, if not yet a central actor in international relations, with the prospect of emerging in decades ahead as a defining power of the twenty-first century.