

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART ONE OF TWELVE

Before the Storm

*India before 1857, the Great Revolt, and the machinery that made
religion the basis of Indian politics*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is my own research project.

I started it because I kept hearing the same arguments again and again. On television, on YouTube, in WhatsApp groups, at family dinners. Someone says Gandhi gave us nothing. Someone says the British left only because they went broke. Someone says one man caused Partition. Someone else says all of that is a lie. Everybody sounds certain. Almost nobody shows the paper.

So I decided to go and look for the paper myself.

My rule for this book is simple. I do not care which answer makes any side happy. I care what the record shows. When a claim turns out to be true, I say it is true, even if it damages a person I admire. When a claim turns out to be false, I say it is false, even if it protects a person I do not admire. And when the honest answer is "we do not know", I say that too, instead of pretending.

I have also tried very hard to write this in the simplest English I can manage. Not because I think the reader is slow. Because I think this history has been kept complicated on purpose. Hard words are a good way to stop ordinary people from checking your claims. Simple words are a good way to let them.

You do not have to agree with my conclusions. You should not agree with them just because they are printed. What I ask is only this: read the evidence before you decide, and check my sources. They are listed at the end of every part.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART ONE

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK	The eight rules I use to test any claim
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HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

The Eight Rules

Before we start the story, I want to show you the tools. These are the eight rules I used to test every claim in all twelve parts. If you learn them, you will be able to test claims yourself, including mine.

Rule 1. Go to the original source

A screenshot is not a source. A YouTube thumbnail is not a source. A source is the actual place where the words first appeared: a speech that was recorded, a letter that still exists, a newspaper of that date, a government file, a book written by the person himself.

For this period we are lucky. Almost everything is preserved. Gandhi's writings run to ninety eight volumes. Nehru's papers, Patel's letters, Ambedkar's speeches, the British cabinet files, the police reports, all of it survives and much of it is free online. So when somebody quotes a leader and cannot tell you the date and place, that is a warning sign.

Rule 2. Read the full paragraph, not the sentence

This is the single most common trick in Indian political argument. Take one sentence out of a long speech, drop the sentence before it and the sentence after it, and the meaning flips completely.

We will see this again and again. A leader answers a specific question about a specific riot in a specific town, and eighty years later the answer is presented as his general life philosophy.

Rule 3. The date and the audience change everything

People change their minds. That is normal. Gandhi at twenty five in South Africa is not Gandhi at seventy five in Noakhali. Jinnah in 1916 is the opposite of Jinnah in 1946. Ambedkar's view of Congress in 1932 is not his view in 1947.

So before you judge a quote, ask two questions. When was this said? And who was he speaking to? A speech to a hostile British committee, a private letter to a friend, and a public prayer meeting are three different things.

Rule 4. Ask who actually had the power to decide

Many famous "blunders" are blamed on the wrong person. Before you blame anyone for a decision, find out who had the legal authority to make it. Gandhi held no government post after 1934. He was not even a member of the Congress party in his last years. That does not mean he had no influence. It means his influence and his authority were different things, and we should not confuse them.

Rule 5. Compare the public words with the private ones

Politicians say one thing on stage and another in a private letter. Luckily we have both for this period. British viceroys wrote frank private notes to London. Congress leaders wrote frank letters to each other. When public and private match, the claim is strong. When they clash, the private version is usually closer to the truth.

Rule 6. Be very careful with "he could have" claims

"He could have saved him." "He could have stopped it." These sentences feel like facts but they are guesses about a world that never happened. To take such a claim seriously we need to see three things: that the person had the actual power to do it, that he knew he had it, and that he chose not to use it. If any one of the three is missing, the claim is only an opinion.

Rule 7. Accept that answers can be mixed

Our public debate wants heroes and villains. Real history mostly gives you people who were right about one thing and badly wrong about another. A verdict of "half true" is not me sitting on the fence. Sometimes half true is simply the correct answer.

Rule 8. Look for what the claim leaves out

The strongest propaganda is rarely a lie. It is usually a true fact with the surrounding facts removed. So after you check whether something is true, ask a second question: what else was happening at the same time that I am not being told?

The verdict scale used in this book

VERDICT	WHAT IT MEANS
TRUE	The record supports it clearly.
MOSTLY TRUE	Correct in the main, with a detail wrong or exaggerated.
HALF TRUE	A real fact is present but an equally real fact is missing.
MISLEADING	Every word may be accurate, yet the impression created is false.
FALSE	The record contradicts it.
STILL DEBATED	Serious historians disagree and the evidence does not settle it.

CHAPTER ONE

What Was India Before the British Came?

To understand how a country got divided, we first have to ask an awkward question: was it one country to begin with?

The uncomfortable starting point

Here is a fact that annoys people on all sides. On the day Robert Clive won the Battle of Plassey in 1757, there was no single country called India with one government, one capital, one army and one border.

There was a large landmass with a great many rulers on it. The Mughal emperor sat in Delhi with an empty treasury and shrinking power. The Marathas controlled huge stretches of the west and centre. Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad were run by governors who had stopped taking orders from Delhi. The Sikh misls were rising in Punjab. Mysore had its own strong state. Rajput houses, Jat chiefs, Rohilla warlords and hundreds of smaller kingdoms filled the gaps.

So if someone tells you "India was never one nation before the British", the political part of that sentence is basically correct.

But that is only half the picture

Now the other half, which annoys the opposite side.

Political unity is not the only kind of unity. Long before the British, this landmass shared things that made it recognisably one civilisational space:

- **Pilgrimage.** A pilgrim from Tamil Nadu walked to Badrinath in the Himalayas. Shankaracharya, in the eighth century, set up centres in the four corners of the subcontinent. That is a mental map of a whole land, drawn a thousand years before any nationalist speech.
- **Trade.** Cotton from Gujarat, spices from Malabar, silk from Bengal and horses from the northwest moved along routes that crossed every kingdom.
- **Language and learning.** Sanskrit worked across the south and north as a shared scholarly language. Persian later did the same job for administration, from Kabul to Bengal to the Deccan.
- **A shared name.** Outsiders had called this region Hind, Hindustan or India for well over two thousand years. Greeks, Persians, Arabs and Chinese travellers all used a single name for it. You do not invent a single name for a place you see as fifty unrelated places.

So the honest summary is this. India before the British was one civilisation with many governments. Europe, at the same time, was also one civilisation with many governments, and nobody says Europe did not exist.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Think of a very large joint family living in one huge old house. They share the courtyard, the well, the festivals and the family name. But every brother controls his own rooms and they fight about the property. That was India in 1757. Not one household with one boss. Not fifty unrelated families either.

Why this matters for the whole book

This point is not just history trivia. It became a political weapon, and it still is one.

In the 1940s the Muslim League argued that India was never one nation, so cutting it was not really cutting anything. Congress argued that India was one nation, so cutting it was an amputation. Both sides were selecting the half of the truth that suited them.

Keep this in mind. When we reach 1940 and 1947, the argument about whether India was ever "one" will be at the centre of everything.

How many kingdoms were there?

By the time the British were finished, they had drawn a line through the subcontinent of a different kind. About sixty percent of the land was ruled directly by them, called British India. The rest was left with Indian rulers who accepted British supremacy, called the princely states.

When the British finally left in 1947, there were **565 princely states** with official recognition, ranging from Hyderabad, which was bigger than many European countries, down to tiny estates of a few villages. That number matters. It tells you that even in 1947 India was not a single administrative block waiting to be handed over. Somebody was going to have to stitch it together, and that story belongs to Sardar Patel in Part 9.

CHAPTER TWO

Did Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs Live in Peace?

This is the question everything else stands on. If the answer is "perfect peace until the British came", one story follows. If the answer is "endless war for a thousand years", a very different story follows. Both answers are wrong.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY, VERSION A

"Hindus and Muslims lived like brothers for centuries. There was no communal problem at all. The British invented the whole thing in the nineteenth century."

WHAT PEOPLE SAY, VERSION B

"There was a thousand year war. Temples were smashed, people were forcibly converted, and the two communities could never live together. Partition was simply the final admission of a truth that was always there."

Let us take the evidence for version A first

There is a great deal of it, and it is not sentimental nonsense.

Shared saints and shared shrines. The Bhakti movement among Hindus and the Sufi movement among Muslims grew side by side and borrowed from each other openly. Kabir, a weaver, was claimed by both Hindus and Muslims and mocked the priests of both. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, travelled to Mecca and to Hindu holy cities and taught that ritual identity was not the point. Sufi dargahs like Ajmer drew, and still draw, crowds of Hindus as well as Muslims.

Mixed administrations. Mughal armies and offices were full of Hindus. Akbar's finance minister Todar Mal, his general Man Singh, and thousands of Rajput and Kayastha officials ran the empire. Later, Maratha and Sikh armies had Muslim gunners, cavalry and commanders. Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjab, had Muslim generals and repaired mosques.

Everyday economic life. Village India ran on caste and craft networks that crossed religion. The weaver was often Muslim, the trader often Hindu or Jain, the farmer either. They needed each other every single day.

Rulers who built bridges deliberately. Akbar abolished the jizya tax on non Muslims in 1564, married into Rajput families, and ran debates between scholars of different faiths. Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's eldest son, had the Upanishads translated into Persian and argued that Hindu and Muslim mysticism were saying the same thing in two languages.

Now the evidence for version B

Also real, and it does not disappear because it is uncomfortable.

Temple destruction happened. It was not constant and not universal, but it happened, and it was often deliberate. Mahmud of Ghazni's raid on Somnath in 1026 is the most famous. Later rulers destroyed temples too, frequently as a political act against a defeated rival king rather than a religious campaign against ordinary people, but the temples were destroyed all the same and the memory lasted.

The jizya tax. A tax on non Muslims, removed by Akbar in 1564 and brought back by Aurangzeb in 1679. Whatever the administrative logic, it told non Muslims that they were a separate and lesser legal category.

Sikh history in particular. This is where the "eternal brotherhood" story breaks down hardest. Guru Arjan Dev was executed under Jahangir in 1606. Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in Delhi in 1675 under Aurangzeb, by tradition for defending the right of Kashmiri Hindus to keep their faith. The two youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh were killed at Sirhind in 1705. These are not stories invented by modern politics. They are the founding memories of a community, remembered every year.

Conflict before the British arrived. The historian Christopher Bayly studied religious conflict in India from 1700 to 1860 and found something inconvenient for both camps. Riots and sectarian clashes existed before British rule. They usually came from concrete causes: control of a holy site, competition between merchant groups, processions crossing the wrong street, or a ruler claiming legitimacy by "freeing" a sacred city. The Marathas explicitly wanted to free Benares and Prayag from Muslim rule. In Surat in 1734 there were serious clashes involving rising and falling merchant communities.

So what is the truthful answer?

Both versions have real evidence and both leave out the other half. Here is the version that fits all the evidence at once.

Religious identity existed before the British. Hindus knew they were Hindus, Muslims knew they were Muslims, Sikhs very sharply knew they were Sikhs. There were periods of genuine friendship and periods of genuine bloodshed. None of that was invented in London.

But here is the part that changes everything. Before the nineteenth century, religion was not the main organising principle of politics. Political fights were about land, revenue, succession and dynasty. Armies were mixed. Alliances crossed religion constantly. Aurangzeb fought Muslim kingdoms in the Deccan and had Hindu generals in his army. Shivaji fought Aurangzeb and had Muslim officers in his. The Maratha side at the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 and the Afghan side both contained soldiers of several faiths.

What happens in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is not the birth of religious identity. It is something else: religion becomes the main unit of *political* counting, representation and power. That is the real change, and Chapter 7 will show you the machine that did it.

VERDICT

HALF TRUE ON BOTH SIDES

"Perfect harmony until the British" is **FALSE**. Conflict predates them and the Sikh record alone disproves it.

"A thousand year war that made Partition inevitable" is also **FALSE**. Cooperation was the daily norm, armies and courts were mixed, and religion was not the axis of politics.

The accurate statement: the difference was old, the **political system built on that difference was new**.

A WORD OF CAUTION ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

This is the most emotionally loaded ground in the whole book, and it is where fake quotes breed fastest. Numbers of temples destroyed, numbers of people converted and numbers killed in old wars are thrown around online with a confidence that no historian would use, because reliable records for those centuries mostly do not exist. When you see a precise figure for something that happened in 1100, ask where it was counted and who counted it.

CHAPTER THREE

How a Trading Company Took Over a Subcontinent

The British did not arrive as a government. They arrived as a business. Understanding that is essential, because a business conquers differently from an empire.

From a shop to a state

The English East India Company was set up in 1600 to trade. For a century and a half it mostly did trade, from small coastal posts, at the mercy of whichever Indian ruler was nearby.

Then the Mughal empire weakened and the coast turned into a battlefield between European companies and Indian successors. Three dates changed everything:

YEAR	EVENT	WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANT
1757	Battle of Plassey	Clive defeated the Nawab of Bengal largely by buying off his commander Mir Jafar. It was less a battle than a bought result. It gave the Company control of Bengal politics.
1764	Battle of Buxar	A real military victory over the combined forces of Bengal, Awadh and the Mughal emperor. This one settled the question.
1765	Grant of the Diwani	The Mughal emperor formally handed the Company the right to collect the revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. A trading company now had the taxing power of a state over roughly twenty million people.

From there it spread over the next ninety years, by war, by treaty and by swallowing states whose rulers died without a son, until in 1849 Punjab, the last big independent power, was annexed.

The five changes that mattered most

The conquest is the famous part. The changes underneath were more important for our story.

1. They changed who owned the land

In 1793 the Permanent Settlement in Bengal made revenue collectors into landlords with legal ownership, and made the actual cultivator a tenant who could be thrown off. Elsewhere other systems were used, but the direction was the same: land became private property with paper titles, and revenue had to be paid in cash on a fixed date, whether the harvest was good or bad. Millions of families lost customary rights they had held for generations.

2. They changed the economy from making things to growing things

India in 1750 was one of the world's great manufacturing regions, above all in textiles. British policy, backed by tariffs at home and power here, reversed the flow. India increasingly sold raw cotton, indigo, opium and jute, and bought back finished cloth made in Lancashire. Weaving

towns shrank. This is what the phrase "deindustrialisation" means, and it is the economic engine of everything Indians later complained about.

3. They wrote down religion as law

This one is the quiet giant, and most people have never heard of it. The British decided they would rule Indians by "their own laws" in personal matters: marriage, inheritance, adoption, religious endowments. It sounded respectful. To do it, they had to decide what those laws were. So they hired pandits and maulvis, took selected old texts, translated them, and turned a flexible, local, varied set of customs into fixed written codes: one "Hindu law" and one "Muslim law", applied across the whole country.

Think about what that does. Before, your rules came from your caste, your region, your village council. Now the law itself asked you a question at the door of every court: *which community are you?* Your legal rights depended on the answer. Religion was no longer only about faith. It was now a legal box you lived inside.

4. They changed education and the language of getting ahead

In 1835 Thomas Macaulay's famous Minute pushed English as the medium of higher education, with the openly stated aim of forming a class "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Government jobs and courts moved to English. Persian, which had been the language of administration for centuries, was dropped in 1837.

This had a lopsided effect that matters enormously later. Hindu commercial and clerical castes in Bengal, Bombay and Madras took to English education early and filled the new offices. Large sections of the Muslim elite, whose careers had been built on Persian and on service to Mughal successor states, held back, partly from suspicion and partly because their whole professional world had just been abolished. Within two generations there was a visible gap in government employment between the two communities. That gap becomes the seed of Muslim separate politics in Part 2.

5. They connected the country

Railways from the 1850s, the telegraph, the postal system, printing presses, a single legal code for crime in 1860, and one currency. The motive was control and profit. The result was unintended: for the first time, a man in Madras could read tomorrow what a man in Lahore said today. The British built the nervous system that Indian nationalism would later run on.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

The British did four things at once. They took the land, they took the factories, they put every Indian into an official religious box, and then they built the roads, wires and newspapers that let everyone in those boxes talk to each other. The last one was a mistake from their point of view. The third one was the fuse.

CHAPTER FOUR

1857: The Year Indians Fought Together

Every part of the Indian freedom argument circles back to 1857. Both because of what happened, and because of what the British learned from it.

Why it exploded

The cartridge story is true but it is the match, not the fuel. The fuel had been piling up for years:

- **Annexations.** The Doctrine of Lapse allowed the Company to swallow any princely state whose ruler died without a natural heir. Satara, Jhansi, Nagpur and others went this way. In 1856 Awadh was annexed on the ground of misgovernment. Awadh was where a very large share of the Bengal Army's soldiers came from. The Company had just insulted the homeland of its own troops.
- **Soldiers' grievances.** Cuts to allowances, a new law requiring service overseas, which high caste sepoys saw as loss of caste, and promotion blocked at the top by British officers.
- **Fear about religion.** Missionary activity had increased and some officers preached openly. A law of 1856 allowed Hindu widows to remarry and another let converts inherit property. Whether or not you think these were good reforms, they convinced many Indians that the government intended to change their faith.
- **Economic pain.** Displaced landlords, ruined weavers, and revenue demands that did not fall when the harvest failed.
- **The cartridge.** The new Enfield rifle came with cartridges to be bitten open, greased with animal fat. Rumour said cow fat and pig fat. That single rumour offended Hindus and Muslims at the same time, which is exactly why it worked.

What happened

In May 1857 sepoys at Meerut shot their British officers and marched on Delhi. They took the city and proclaimed the old, poetic, almost powerless Mughal emperor **Bahadur Shah Zafar** as ruler of India. That act was deliberate: they needed a symbol that could stand for the whole country rather than one region.

The revolt then spread across north and central India, roughly from Delhi in the west to Benares in the east. Of the Bengal Army's seventy four regular native infantry regiments, **fifty four rebelled**. All ten regiments of Bengal light cavalry mutinied. Large numbers of civilians joined, especially dispossessed landholders and peasants.

The point that everyone should notice

Look at who led it, side by side:

LEADER	WHERE	COMMUNITY
Bahadur Shah Zafar	Delhi	Muslim, made the symbolic head by mainly Hindu sepoys
Bakht Khan	Delhi	Muslim, commander of the rebel forces
Rani Lakshmibai	Jhansi	Hindu
Nana Saheb and Tantia Tope	Kanpur	Hindu, Maratha
Begum Hazrat Mahal	Lucknow	Muslim
Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah	Faizabad and Awadh	Muslim, a religious preacher leading a mixed force
Kunwar Singh	Bihar	Hindu, Rajput landholder aged about eighty

Hindu soldiers marched to Delhi to restore a Mughal Muslim emperor. Muslim commanders fought under Hindu chiefs and the other way round. Some rebel proclamations explicitly called on Hindus and Muslims to unite against the foreigner, and cow slaughter was banned in rebel held Delhi to keep Hindu support.

Hold on to this. In 1857 the two communities that would be told, ninety years later, that they could never share a country, fought a joint war. Whatever came later, it was not written in stone from the beginning.

Who did not join, and why

Honesty means saying this too. 1857 was a north and central Indian revolt, not an all India war.

- **The Sikhs of Punjab largely did not join, and many actively helped the British.** Punjab had been annexed only eight years earlier in 1849, so the anger against the Company was fresh, and yet the Sikh response went the other way. The reason was the rebels' own choice of symbol. Declaring a descendant of Aurangzeb as emperor of India meant, to many Sikhs, the possible return of the empire under which Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur had been executed and the sons of Guru Gobind Singh killed. The British understood this perfectly and reminded them of it. Among the irregular units, six Sikh and three Gurkha units actively supported the Company.
- **The Bombay and Madras armies stayed loyal**, so the entire south and much of the west stayed quiet.
- **Most princely rulers backed the British**, including Hyderabad, Gwalior's ruler, Kashmir and the Sikh states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind. Governor General Canning later called them "breakwaters in the storm".
- **Many educated and commercial Indians** in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras saw the revolt as a backward looking attempt to bring back old kings, and wanted no part of it. A young **Sayyid**

Ahmad Khan, a Company loyalist who saved British lives during the revolt, would go on to draw a lesson from it that shapes our entire Part 2.

How it ended

Delhi fell in September 1857 after a brutal siege. Lucknow and Jhansi followed. The last major fighting ended in 1858 and Tantia Tope was executed in 1859.

The reprisals were savage and were meant to be. Villages were burnt, prisoners were hanged in rows along roads, and some were executed by being tied to the mouth of a cannon and blown apart, a punishment chosen because it destroyed the body and so terrified the living. Delhi was emptied of its people. Bahadur Shah Zafar, then over eighty, was tried, stripped of his title and exiled to Rangoon, where he died in 1862. His sons were shot dead by a British officer after surrendering. The Mughal dynasty, after three hundred and thirty one years, was finished.

WHY THE NAME OF THIS EVENT IS ITSELF A POLITICAL FIGHT

The British called it the Sepoy Mutiny, which makes it sound like an army discipline problem. Indian nationalists, following V. D. Savarkar's 1909 book, called it the First War of Indian Independence, which makes it sound like a planned national uprising. Neither name is neutral. It was bigger than a mutiny, because civilians and rulers joined across a huge area. It was smaller than a national war, because half the country sat it out and the rebels had no single aim beyond removing the Company. "The Great Revolt of 1857" is the least dishonest label.

CHAPTER FIVE

What the British Changed After They Won

Winning a war teaches the winner something. What the British learned in 1858 shaped India for the next ninety years, and it is the true beginning of the road to Partition.

The Company is sacked

The revolt destroyed the idea of a private company ruling a subcontinent. In 1858 the Company was abolished and India passed directly to the British Crown. On 1 November 1858, Lord Canning read out **Queen Victoria's Proclamation** at Allahabad.

It promised three things that tell you exactly what had frightened London.

"We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose Our convictions on any of Our subjects... none be in any wise favoured, none molested or disquieted, by reason of their religious faith or observances."

Queen Victoria's Proclamation to the Princes, Chiefs and People of India, 1 November 1858

- **No more interference in religion.** They had seen what the rumour of a greased cartridge could do.
- **No more annexation of princely states.** Existing treaties would be honoured and adoption of heirs allowed. The princes had proved useful and would now be preserved as a conservative wall against nationalism.
- **Equal treatment in government service regardless of race or creed.** This promise, made in 1858, was broken so consistently for the next sixty years that educated Indians quoting it back at the British became one of the standard opening moves of early nationalism.

The army is rebuilt on purpose

This is the most revealing change, because an army reorganisation shows you what a government actually fears rather than what it says.

Before 1857, the Bengal Army had been full of high caste Hindus from the same districts, in units where men shared religion, region and caste, and could therefore act together. The Peel Commission reviewed the whole system, and the reforms that followed did the opposite:

- **The ratio of British to Indian troops was raised sharply,** and artillery was kept almost entirely in British hands. Indians could not be trusted with the guns.
- **Recruitment shifted** away from Awadh and the Gangetic plain towards Punjab, the Northwest Frontier and Nepal, that is, towards the groups that had helped crush the revolt.
- **The "martial races" theory was invented.** The British declared that only certain communities, Sikhs, Punjabi Muslims, Gurkhas, Rajputs, Pathans, Dogras, Marathas, were naturally suited to soldiering, and the rest of India was not. There was no science in it. The list corresponded

closely to who had been loyal in 1857. But it was taught, believed and eventually internalised by Indians themselves.

- **Regiments were deliberately mixed or deliberately separated** so that no single religious or regional bloc could combine again. The stated aim in official papers was to ensure that the parts of the army could be used to check each other.

It is in this context that the most quoted sentence in this whole debate appears.

"Divide et impera was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours."

Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, in a Minute of 14 May 1859 submitted to the commission reviewing the Indian Army

Note the date and the context carefully, because this is Rule 1 and Rule 3 in action. The quote is real and it is verifiable. It comes from 1859, not 1857 as it is often captioned online. And it was written about **army organisation**, arguing against blending Indian troops into one uniform force. That is narrower than the way it is usually presented. It is still, however, an official saying the quiet part out loud in a government document.

First the Muslims are punished

Here is a fact that surprises almost everyone, because it does not fit either popular story.

For roughly the first fifteen years after 1857, British policy was **anti Muslim**, not pro Muslim. The revolt had gathered around a Mughal emperor in Delhi, so the British concluded that Muslims were the natural conspirators.

- Delhi was emptied of its whole population. Hindu residents were allowed back in **1858**. Muslims were kept out for another year, and were readmitted from **1859** only if they could prove they had not taken part. Their houses were seized by the army as confiscated property.
- Mosques in Delhi, including the Fatehpuri Masjid and for a time the Jama Masjid area, were seized, sold or occupied as troop barracks.
- A long series of state trials in the 1860s targeted a Muslim reformist network the British labelled "Wahhabi", treating Islamic revivalism itself as sedition.
- In 1871 the Viceroy Lord Mayo asked a direct question: are Indian Muslims bound by their religion to rebel against the Queen? The civil servant **W. W. Hunter** answered it in a book, *The Indian Musalmans*, published in August 1871.

Hunter's answer was more interesting than the question. He said the danger was real but the cause was grievance, not doctrine. Muslims, he argued, had been shut out of government service, their traditional education had lost its value, their endowments had been mishandled, and a community that had once supplied the rulers was now the poorest and most excluded group in Bengal.

That book quietly changed the direction of British policy. If Muslim anger came from exclusion, then the answer was inclusion. Over the following decades the British began to see the Muslim elite not as the enemy but as a possible partner, and above all as a **counterweight**.

Then a Congress appears, and the counterweight becomes policy

In 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded, at first a polite body of English educated professionals asking for more Indians in government service and a bigger say in the councils. Its membership was overwhelmingly Hindu, simply because English education had spread faster among Hindu service castes, as we saw in Chapter 3.

Almost immediately, British officials began encouraging Muslim leaders to stay away from it. This is documented in their own letters, not in nationalist imagination. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who had founded the Aligarh college in 1875 to bring modern education to Muslims, was warmly supported by officials as he argued publicly that Muslims should keep out of Congress politics and trust the British instead.

We will follow that story properly in Part 2. For now, notice the shape of it: within one generation, the British went from treating Muslims as the chief suspects of 1857 to treating them as the useful balance against a Hindu majority nationalism. The community did not change. The British need changed.

CHAPTER SIX

Was "Divide and Rule" Real, or Just a Slogan?

This is the first big claim in the book, so let us test it properly, using the eight rules.

THE CLAIM, AT ITS STRONGEST

"Hindus and Muslims had no serious political quarrel. The British, terrified by the unity they saw in 1857, deliberately manufactured a religious divide through their army policy, their census, their separate electorates and their patronage of Muslim separatism. Partition was designed in London, not demanded in India."

THE COUNTER CLAIM, AT ITS STRONGEST

"Divide and rule is a comforting excuse. Hindu and Muslim identities were centuries old and had clashed before any Englishman arrived. Indians made their own choices, formed their own parties and demanded their own partition. Blaming the British is a way of avoiding responsibility. And in fact the British spent their last years trying to keep India united."

The evidence for

EVIDENCE	WHAT IT SHOWS
Elphinstone's Minute, 14 May 1859	A senior official stating "divide et impera" as a principle for organising the Indian Army after the joint revolt.
Army reforms after 1858	Deliberate policy of recruiting by community and balancing groups against each other, so that no combined rising was possible again.
Codified separate personal law	The state itself made religion a legal category that decided your rights in court.
The census from 1871 onwards	Religion recorded for every person, creating countable majorities and minorities. See Chapter 7.
Official encouragement of Muslim abstention from Congress after 1885	Documented in officials' correspondence, not merely alleged.
Partition of Bengal, 1905	Curzon divided Bengal on lines that created a Muslim majority eastern province, and openly courted the Muslim elite there while breaking the strongest centre of nationalist agitation. This is Part 2.
Separate electorates, 1909	The single most consequential act. Muslims would vote only for Muslim candidates in reserved seats. Politics itself was now organised by religion, by law. This is Part 2.

The evidence against, or at least the complications

- **Conflict predates them.** As Chapter 2 showed, Bayly and others have documented religious conflict in India from 1700 onwards, before British power was established in most of the country. The British did not have to invent a difference that already existed.
- **Indians had agency.** Sayyid Ahmad Khan was not a British puppet. Jinnah was not a British agent, and by 1946 the British were often exasperated with him. The Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha and Congress all made real, independent decisions, and we will examine those decisions honestly in later parts.
- **The British were not consistent.** Some officials wanted division, others genuinely wanted a single stable dominion, above all at the end. The Cabinet Mission of 1946 proposed a united India with a weak centre, and the British accepted Partition only after their own preferred plan collapsed. If Partition was the master plan all along, this was a strange way to run it.
- **It can become a lazy excuse.** If every Indian failure is the fault of the British, then no Indian leader ever has to answer for anything. That is comfortable, and it is not history.

Weighing it

The mistake in this argument is that both sides are answering different questions.

Did the British *create* Hindu and Muslim identity? No. That is clearly false.

Did the British *turn a social difference into the operating system of politics*? Yes, and they wrote down that they were doing it. Once law, jobs, army recruitment, census categories and finally votes were all organised by religion, then every ambitious Indian, of every faith, had a rational incentive to organise his followers by religion too. That is not a conspiracy. It is an incentive structure. And an incentive structure is far more powerful than a conspiracy, because it does not need anyone to keep the secret.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Imagine an old wall with a real crack in it. The crack was there before anyone came. Now imagine somebody drives a wedge into that crack, and then rebuilds the whole house so that every door, every stair and every water pipe runs along the wedge. He did not make the crack. But after his rebuilding, you cannot use the house without using the crack. That is what British rule did.

VERDICT ON "THE BRITISH DIVIDED US"

HALF TRUE, AND THE MOST IMPORTANT HALF IS USUALLY MISSED

FALSE that the British invented Hindu and Muslim difference or that Partition was designed in London from the start.

TRUE that after 1857 they deliberately organised the army, and later the electorate, to prevent combined resistance, and that a senior official wrote the Roman motto down as policy in 1859.

The accurate statement: the British did not create the divide, they institutionalised it. Indian leaders then chose, freely and repeatedly, to work that system rather than refuse it. Responsibility is shared, and we will assign the Indian share in Parts 2 to 9 without flinching.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Census: The Day India Learned to Count Itself

If you remember only one chapter from Part 1, make it this one. Nothing else explains so much with so little drama. A clerk with a form did more to make Partition possible than most politicians.

The first great count

Between 1871 and 1872 the British carried out the first systematic attempt to count everybody in India. It was incomplete and not perfectly simultaneous, but it was the beginning. From 1881 the census became regular, every ten years, and it still is.

The enumerator arrived with a printed form. On that form was a box marked religion. And here is the crucial thing: **you had to choose one**. One box. No overlaps allowed.

The first count produced numbers that would echo for the next seventy five years:

GROUP	ROUGHLY	SHARE
Hindus, with Sikhs counted in	140 million	about 73.7 percent
Muslims, recorded as Mahomedans	40 million	about 21.5 percent
All others, including Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Parsis, Jews and tribal faiths	9 million	about 5 percent

Why a simple form was so powerful

Four things happened the moment those numbers were printed.

1. Fuzzy identities were forced to become hard ones

Real religious life in India was full of overlap. Villagers worshipped at a Sufi shrine and a temple in the same week. Communities existed that had Hindu names and Muslim practices, or the reverse. Many people, asked their religion, answered with their caste, their sect, their guru or their village deity, and the census reports themselves record the enumerators' frustration at this.

None of that fitted in a box. So the state chose for them. Over successive censuses the state's categories hardened, and people gradually learned to answer in the state's language, because that was the language in which benefits came.

2. Religion became a number, and numbers become political power

Before the census, "the Muslims of India" was a feeling. After the census, it was **forty million people, 21.5 percent**. That is a completely different kind of fact. You can bargain with a number. You can demand a share proportionate to a number. You can be frightened by a number.

And once the councils opened up even slightly, the arithmetic became obvious to everyone at once. In any system of counting heads across the whole country, one community would always win and another would always lose. The moment Indians understood that, the entire logic of Muslim separate politics followed, and so did the entire logic of Hindu majoritarian politics. Both are children of the same arithmetic.

Numbers became power on the day power began to be counted.

The shortest way to state the argument of this chapter

3. Caste was counted too, and hardened too

The same census counted caste, and worse, tried to rank castes in order of social precedence. Officials asked communities to state their position, and communities responded by petitioning, organising and campaigning for a better classification. Caste associations were formed for the specific purpose of arguing with the census. A system that had been varied, local and somewhat fluid was written into a national list.

This matters directly for our story. When Ambedkar later demands separate representation for the Depressed Classes, and when Gandhi fasts against it in 1932, they are both arguing inside a framework of countable, official caste categories that the census built. That is Part 4.

4. It started a numbers race

Once everyone could see the shares, movements appeared whose explicit purpose was to change them. From the 1880s and especially the 1900s and 1920s you get organised conversion and reconversion campaigns, Arya Samaj shuddhi drives on one side and tabligh and tanzim work on the other, alongside cow protection societies, Hindi and Urdu language agitations, and disputes over music before mosques.

Census officials themselves noticed and commented on it. Communities were now watching each other's growth rates in a published government table, once every ten years, and reacting.

THE HONEST COUNTERPOINT

Some historians push back on this argument, and they have a point worth hearing. A census does not force anybody to hate anybody. Counting people is what every modern state does, including free India, which still records religion in its census. Identities were also being reshaped from inside India by reform movements, printing, railways and new religious publishing, and these were not British projects. So the census should be understood as a powerful accelerator, not as a magic cause. Nobody in 1872 sat down and thought "this form will divide India in 1947".

VERDICT ON "THE CENSUS CREATED COMMUNAL POLITICS"

MOSTLY TRUE, WITH ONE CORRECTION

It did not create religious identity, which already existed. It created **religious arithmetic**, which did not. Turning communities into official, published, competing numbers is what made majority and minority into permanent political positions rather than passing facts. Every later demand, separate electorates, weightage, reserved seats, population transfer, and finally a separate country, is an argument about those numbers.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

By 1885, when the Indian National Congress holds its first meeting, all the pieces that will produce 1947 are already lying on the table. Not the decision. Not the inevitability. Just the pieces.

- A land that was one civilisation and many states, so that both "we were always one" and "we were never one" can be argued honestly.
- Communities with a genuinely mixed history, capable of both the Bhakti and Sufi meeting ground and the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur.
- A conquest that made religion into a legal box, wrecked the old economy, and created an education gap between communities.
- A joint revolt in 1857 that proved unity was possible, followed by a defeat that taught the rulers to make sure it never happened again.
- An army, a bureaucracy and soon an electorate organised so that the community you belonged to decided what you could get.
- And a printed number telling every Indian exactly how many of him there were.

What is still missing in 1885 is a demand. Nobody yet wants a separate country. Nobody has said Hindus and Muslims are two nations. The Muslim League does not exist. Jinnah is a nine year old boy in Karachi. Gandhi is a sixteen year old schoolboy in Porbandar who has just lost his father.

In Part 2 we will watch the demand being born, step by step: Sayyid Ahmad Khan's warning, the partition of Bengal in 1905 which was India's first partition and is usually forgotten, the founding of the Muslim League in 1906, and the decision of 1909 that made religion the basis of the vote itself.

Timeline for Part 1

YEAR	EVENT
1526	Babur defeats the Delhi Sultan at Panipat. Mughal rule begins.
1564	Akbar abolishes the jizya tax on non Muslims.
1600	English East India Company chartered in London.
1606	Guru Arjan Dev executed under Jahangir.
1675	Guru Tegh Bahadur executed in Delhi under Aurangzeb.
1679	Aurangzeb reimposes the jizya.
1707	Aurangzeb dies. Mughal decline accelerates.
1757	Battle of Plassey. Company power in Bengal begins.

YEAR	EVENT
1764	Battle of Buxar.
1765	Company granted the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
1793	Permanent Settlement in Bengal.
1829	Sati banned.
1835	Macaulay's Minute. English education policy adopted.
1837	Persian replaced by English as the official language of the courts.
1849	Punjab annexed. The last major independent power falls.
1853	First passenger railway line, Bombay to Thane.
1856	Awadh annexed. Hindu Widows Remarriage Act passed.
1857	The Great Revolt. Bahadur Shah Zafar proclaimed emperor at Delhi.
1858	Revolt crushed. Company abolished. Queen Victoria's Proclamation, 1 November.
1859	Elphinstone's Minute of 14 May: "divide et impera... should be ours".
1862	Bahadur Shah Zafar dies in exile in Rangoon.
1871	W. W. Hunter publishes <i>The Indian Musalmans</i> .
1871 to 1872	First systematic all India census. Religion recorded for every person.
1875	Sayyid Ahmad Khan founds the Aligarh college.
1885	Indian National Congress founded in Bombay.

Word list

Subcontinent	The large landmass containing today's India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.
East India Company	A private British trading company that ended up ruling most of India from 1765 to 1858.
Diwani	The right to collect land revenue and administer civil justice in a province.
Sepoy	An Indian soldier serving in a European commanded army.
Doctrine of Lapse	A Company rule allowing it to take over any princely state whose ruler died without a natural heir.

Princely state	A territory left under an Indian ruler who accepted British supremacy. There were 565 of them in 1947.
Jizya	A tax collected from non Muslim subjects under some Islamic states.
Bhakti	A devotional movement within Hinduism stressing personal love of God over ritual and priesthood.
Sufi	The mystical tradition within Islam, stressing inner experience and love of God.
Communal	In Indian usage, relating to conflict or politics organised along religious community lines. It does not mean "shared".
Deindustrialisation	The decline of a country's manufacturing, here the collapse of Indian textile production under British trade policy.
Personal law	The law governing marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption, applied to a person according to his or her religion.
Martial races	The British theory that only certain Indian communities were naturally fit to be soldiers. It had no scientific basis and closely matched who had stayed loyal in 1857.
Census	An official count of the whole population, in India held every ten years since 1881.
Separate electorates	A voting system in which members of one religion vote only for candidates of that religion, in seats reserved for it. Introduced in 1909. Covered in Part 2.
Shuddhi	An Arya Samaj campaign to bring converts back into the Hindu fold, active mainly from the 1900s.

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COMING NEXT

Part 2: Where the Two Nation Idea Was Born. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and what he actually said. The 1905 partition of Bengal, India's forgotten first partition. The founding of the Muslim League in 1906 and who paid for it. The separate electorates of 1909 and why many historians call that the point of no return. Iqbal in 1930, Rahmat Ali in 1933, and the uncomfortable question of which Hindu leaders also said that Hindus and Muslims were two nations.

Part 1 of a twelve part series. Researched, written and compiled by Lovepreet Singh.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART TWO OF TWELVE

Where the Two Nation Idea Was Born

*Sir Sayyid, the forgotten partition of 1905, the Muslim League,
and the vote that made religion the basis of Indian politics*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This part was the hardest one to write so far, and I want to explain why before you begin.

Almost everything in these pages has been turned into a weapon by somebody. One side quotes a single sentence from Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and says: here, this is the man who broke India. The other side quotes a different sentence from the same man and says: look, he called Hindus and Muslims the two eyes of one bride. Both sentences are real. Both men are quoting accurately. And both are hiding the other half from you.

So in this part I have done something I will keep doing through the whole book. Where a speech matters, I went and found the speech itself, not a summary of it, and I have given you the words with the date, the place and the size of the audience. The 1888 Meerut speech is preserved in full. So is Iqbal's 1930 address. So is Rahmat Ali's 1933 pamphlet. You can read them yourself. I have put the links in the sources.

One finding in this part genuinely surprised me while researching, and I have given it a chapter of its own. I had always been told that the idea of splitting India on religion came from one community. That is not what the record shows. I have laid out the dates and you can judge for yourself.

As always: if a fact here damages someone I like, I have printed it anyway. That is the only rule that makes a book like this worth anything.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART TWO

RECAP	Where Part 1 left us, in one page
CHAPTER 1	Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan: the man blamed for everything
CHAPTER 2	The forgotten first partition: Bengal, 1905
CHAPTER 3	Simla and Dhaka: how the Muslim League was born
CHAPTER 4	1909: the year the road forked
CHAPTER 5	The years of unity, and how Congress joined the machine
CHAPTER 6	Who else said "two nations"? The uncomfortable list
CLOSING	Timeline, word list, sources, what comes next

RECAP

Where Part One Left Us

If you have not read Part 1, here is everything you need in one page.

India before the British was one civilisation with many governments. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had a genuinely mixed history: real friendship, real bloodshed, and above all a politics that was organised around land and dynasty rather than around religion.

The British conquest changed that in a quiet, structural way. They wrote religion into law, so that your community decided your rights in a courtroom. They created an education gap by shifting to English, which Hindu service castes entered faster than the Muslim elite whose Persian world had just been abolished.

Then came 1857, when Hindus and Muslims fought a joint war and lost. The British studied that defeat carefully and rebuilt the army so that no combined rising could happen again. In 1859 a governor wrote the Roman motto "divide and rule" into an official paper about army recruitment.

For fifteen years after the revolt the British treated Muslims as the chief suspects. Then, from the 1870s, they changed their mind and began to see the Muslim elite as a useful counterweight to a Congress that was mostly Hindu.

And underneath all of it sat the census. From 1871 every Indian had to tick one religion box. Overnight, communities became published, competing numbers: about 73.7 percent Hindu, about 21.5 percent Muslim. Religion had become arithmetic.

Part 1 ended in 1885, at the founding of the Indian National Congress. Nobody yet wanted a separate country. In Part 2 we watch that demand being built, one decision at a time.

CHAPTER ONE

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan: The Man Blamed for Everything

Search his name online today and you will find him described as the father of Partition. You will also find him described as a great believer in Hindu and Muslim unity. Let us go and read what he actually said.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan invented the two nation theory in 1888. He is the original author of Pakistan. Everything that followed, the Muslim League, Jinnah, Partition, the killings, all of it starts with him."

Who he was

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was born in Delhi in 1817 into a family of Mughal court service. He worked for the East India Company as a judge. In 1857, when the revolt broke out, he stayed loyal and personally saved the lives of several British officials at Bijnor. The British rewarded him. Indian nationalists have never forgiven him.

But here is the first thing that gets left out. In 1858, right after the revolt, he wrote a pamphlet called *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, and it was not a loyalist thank you note. It told the British bluntly that the rising had happened because they had shut Indians out of the Legislative Council, ignored Indian opinion, interfered with religion and behaved with contempt. He printed it at his own expense and sent it to Parliament. Several officials wanted him punished for it.

In 1875 he founded the Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh, which later became Aligarh Muslim University. Its purpose was simple and, in his view, urgent: Muslims had fallen behind in modern education, and unless they caught up they would be shut out of every profession in the new India.

What he said before 1887

Now read these, because they are almost never quoted by the people who call him the father of Partition.

"India is like a bride which has got two beautiful and lustrous eyes, Hindus and Mussulmans. If they quarrel against each other that beautiful bride will become ugly, and if one destroys the other, she will lose one eye."

Speech at Patna, January 1883

"O Hindus and Muslims! Do you belong to a country other than India? Do you not live on the soil, and are you not buried under it or cremated on its ghats? If you live and die on this land, then bear in mind that Hindu and Muslim is but a religious word."

Speech at Gurdaspur, 27 January 1884

That is not the language of a separatist. It is the language of a man arguing for a shared country. So what changed?

What changed: the Congress, and the arithmetic

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885. Its early demand was that Indians should be elected to the legislative councils and should have a say over the budget.

To Sayyid Ahmad Khan, that demand rang an alarm bell. Elections across the whole country meant counting heads. Counting heads meant that the group with 73 percent would win and the group with 21 percent would lose, permanently. He had watched the census reports. He knew the arithmetic that Part 1 described.

So in 1887 at Lucknow, and then in a much longer and more famous speech at Meerut on 16 March 1888, he told Muslims to stay out of the Congress.

The Meerut speech of 1888, read properly

The speech was given at the Nauchandi fair to an audience of seven or eight hundred people, mostly Muslim. It was published in English by the *Pioneer* newspaper the same year. Here is the sentence that made him famous.

"Now, suppose that all English, and the whole English army, were to leave India, taking with them all their cannon and their splendid weapons and everything, then who would be rulers of India? Is it possible that under these circumstances two nations, the Mahomedans and the Hindus, could sit on the same throne and remain equal in power? Most certainly not. It is necessary that one of them should conquer the other and thrust it down."

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, speech at Meerut, 16 March 1888, paragraph 7

That is the quote. It is real. It is not out of context in the sense of being faked. But now apply Rule 2 and read the rest of the same speech, and three things appear that change what it means.

First: the translation problem

The speech was delivered in Urdu. The word translated as "nation" throughout the *Pioneer* version is *qaum*, which in nineteenth century Urdu usually means community or people, not nation in the modern sense of a sovereign state. Sir Sayyid uses the same word for Bengalis, for Pathans and even for the English. The scholar Frances Pritchett, who hosts the standard English text used by universities, flags this at the top of the document.

This matters enormously. "Two communities cannot share power equally" is a claim about representation. "Two nations must have two states" is a claim about sovereignty. The first is what he said. The second is what he is quoted as having said.

Second: two paragraphs earlier he says the opposite

"These proposals of the Congress are extremely inexpedient for the country, which is inhabited by two different nations, who drink from the same well, breathe the air of the same city, and depend on each other for its life. To create animosity between them is good neither for peace, nor for the country, nor for the town."

Same speech, paragraph 6

Read that again. In the same speech, he says the two communities drink from the same well and depend on each other, and that creating animosity between them is bad for everyone. He is not calling for separation. He is arguing that elections will create bitterness where none needs to exist.

Earlier still, in paragraph 5, he advises Hindus directly and warns both sides that the agitation against cow slaughter has made things worse, and that "those things that can be done by friendship and affection cannot be done by any pressure or force".

Third: what he actually asked for

Read the end of the speech and the demand becomes clear, and it is not a country. He asks Muslims to do three things: stay out of Congress politics, remain loyal to the British so that power does not pass to the Bengalis, and above all get educated and go into trade.

"Therefore the method we ought to adopt is this: that we should hold ourselves aloof from this political uproar, and reflect on our condition, that we are behindhand in education and are deficient in wealth."

Same speech, paragraph 23

There is no separate state in this speech. There is no partition. There is no territory. There is not even a Muslim political party, which would not exist for another eighteen years. What there is, is a loyalist argument for staying out of elected politics.

The parts that do not excuse him

Being fair means being fair in both directions, so here is the case against him, at full strength.

- He told Muslims that their religious duty was to be friendly to the British because Christians are "People of the Book", and he quoted the Quran to support it. That is using scripture to justify political loyalty to a foreign ruler.
- He argued openly that Indians had no right to representative government at all, because a conquered people cannot claim it. That argument, if accepted, would have blocked freedom for everybody, Hindu and Muslim alike.
- He wrote to the British in terms that flattered them and he received honours from them. His college was funded and protected with official goodwill. He was not a neutral observer.

- Most seriously, whatever he meant by *qaum*, he put into circulation the sentence that Hindus and Muslims could not share power equally. Once a sentence is out in the world, the speaker does not control what is done with it. And a great deal was done with it.

VERDICT ON "SIR SAYYID INVENTED THE TWO NATION THEORY"

MISLEADING

TRUE that he said Hindus and Muslims could not sit on the same throne as equals, in 1888, in public, on the record.

FALSE that he demanded a separate country, a partition, or a Muslim state. He demanded that Muslims avoid elections, stay loyal to the British and get educated.

The missing context: the Urdu word was *qaum*, meaning community, and in the same speech he called the two communities people who drink from the same well and warned against creating animosity between them. Five years earlier he had called them the two eyes of one bride.

The accurate statement: he did not design Pakistan. He identified, correctly and early, the arithmetic problem that a permanent minority faces in a head counting democracy, and he chose the worst possible answer to it, which was to trust the British instead of bargaining with his countrymen.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Imagine a class of one hundred students where every decision is taken by a show of hands. Seventy four students belong to one group, twenty two to another. The twenty two will lose every single vote, forever, no matter how good their argument is. Sir Sayyid saw this problem in 1888 and said, do not play this game. He never said, let us build a separate school. Other people said that, much later, and then quoted him for support.

CHAPTER TWO

The Forgotten First Partition: Bengal, 1905

Ask an average Indian how many times India was partitioned and the answer is one, in 1947. The correct answer is that the first partition on religious lines happened forty two years earlier, and it is the rehearsal for everything that followed.

Why Bengal

The Bengal Presidency in 1903 was a monster of a province. It contained roughly 78 million people, which was more than the population of any European country at the time, and it stretched from Orissa to Assam. The official argument for splitting it was administrative: it was simply too big for one governor to run.

That argument was not fake. Bengal really was unmanageable. But it was also not the whole reason, and we know that because the British wrote the other reason down.

Bengal was the headquarters of Indian nationalism. Calcutta was the capital of British India. Bengali newspapers, Bengali lawyers, Bengali students and Bengali writers were the loudest critics of the Raj in the whole country. Break Bengal, and you break the centre of resistance.

The sentence they should not have written down

On 7 February 1904, Herbert Risley, the Home Secretary of the Government of India, put the logic on paper in an official note.

"Bengal united is a power. Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is perfectly true and one of the merits of the scheme."

Herbert Risley, Home Secretary, Government of India, note dated 7 February 1904

Notice the last clause. He is not admitting an unfortunate side effect. He is listing it as an advantage of the plan. Risley, incidentally, was the same official who had led the caste classification work in the census. The man who counted India was now dividing it.

How the line was drawn

Lord Curzon announced the partition on 20 July 1905 and it took effect on 16 October 1905. The new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam had a Muslim majority. What was left, West Bengal joined with Bihar and Orissa, had a Hindu majority and left Bengali speakers as a minority in their own province.

This is the crucial detail. The line was not drawn where a neutral administrator would have drawn it to make two manageable provinces. It was drawn so that religion and province lined up. Curzon toured East Bengal in early 1904 and told Muslim leaders in Dhaka that the new province would give them a unity they had not enjoyed since the days of the old Muslim rulers, and that they would have their own capital and their own opportunities.

For the Muslim gentry of East Bengal this was a genuinely attractive offer, and we should be honest about that. They were poorer than the Hindu landholding and professional classes of Calcutta, they were under represented in every profession, and here was a province where they would be the majority. Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka became the strongest supporter of the partition. He was not a British stooge for wanting it. He was a leader who saw an advantage for his community and took it.

What happened next: the Swadeshi explosion

The Hindu Bengali reaction was volcanic, and it changed Indian politics forever.

- **The Swadeshi movement.** Boycott British cloth, salt, sugar and schools. Buy Indian. Burn foreign goods in public bonfires. For the first time, an Indian political campaign reached shopkeepers, students and villagers rather than just lawyers writing petitions.
- **Rakhi as protest.** On 16 October 1905, the day the partition took effect, Rabindranath Tagore asked Hindus and Muslims of Bengal to tie rakhis on each other's wrists as a symbol that the province could not be cut. He also wrote the song *Amar Sonar Bangla* in that period. It is today the national anthem of Bangladesh.
- **The rise of the extremists.** Petitioning had failed. Boycott had worked. That lesson split the Congress at Surat in 1907 between the Moderates, who wanted to keep asking politely, and the Extremists led by Tilak, Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal, who wanted to confront.
- **Revolutionary violence.** Secret societies like Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar grew out of this period. Bombs, assassinations of officials, and the beginning of the tradition that would later produce Bhagat Singh.

The part of Swadeshi that is rarely discussed

The Swadeshi movement is remembered, correctly, as the birth of mass politics in India. It also contained a problem that nobody at the time wanted to look at, and it is worth facing here because the same problem returns in every later chapter of this book.

The movement drew its emotional power from Hindu religious imagery. Its great song, *Vande Mataram*, came from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel *Anandamath*, in which the motherland is worshipped as a goddess and the plot involves Hindu ascetics fighting Muslim rulers. Swadeshi vows were taken in temples. Boycott pledges were tied to Kali puja. Volunteers were sworn in with religious ritual.

For Hindu Bengal this was natural and moving. For a Muslim peasant in East Bengal it looked like something else: a movement led by the Hindu landlords he already paid rent to, using worship he did not share, asking him to boycott the cheap British cloth he could actually afford, in order to reverse a partition that had just given his community a province of its own.

There were also boycott enforcers who used social pressure and sometimes force on traders who kept selling foreign goods, and a disproportionate number of those small traders were Muslim. Serious communal rioting broke out in parts of East Bengal in 1906 and 1907.

None of this makes the Swadeshi movement a communal movement. Many Muslims joined it, and its leaders repeatedly appealed for unity, and Tagore's rakhi protest was a sincere and beautiful thing. But a nationalism that speaks in the symbols of one religion will always be heard by the other religion as a claim rather than an invitation, however kindly it is meant. That is not a moral judgement on anybody. It is a fact about how symbols work, and it will explain a great deal in Parts 3, 4 and 8.

The annulment, and the lesson each side took away

The agitation worked. On 12 December 1911, at the Delhi Durbar for King George V, the British announced that the partition of Bengal was cancelled. The two Bengals were reunited. In the same announcement they moved the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi, which was a way of punishing Bengal while conceding to it.

Now watch the two lessons, because they run in opposite directions and both are true.

WHO	WHAT THEY LEARNED IN 1911
Congress and Hindu Bengal	Mass agitation works. Petitions failed for twenty years; six years of boycott reversed a viceroy's decision. This lesson leads directly to Gandhi's methods in Part 3.
Muslim leadership, especially in East Bengal	Loyalty is worthless. They had supported the British scheme, been promised a province, and then watched the British cancel it because Hindus protested. Trusting the British had produced nothing.

That second lesson is one of the most under appreciated moments in the whole story. The strategy of Sir Sayyid, which was to stay loyal and let the British protect Muslim interests, was publicly proved worthless in 1911. Within a decade, large numbers of Indian Muslims moved from loyalty to agitation. In the short run this pushed them *towards* the Congress, which is why the period from 1911 to 1922 is the high point of Hindu and Muslim political unity. In the long run it taught the Muslim League a different lesson: if the British will not protect you and the Congress will not guarantee you, you must get a guarantee written into the constitution itself.

VERDICT ON "BENGAL 1905 WAS DIVIDE AND RULE"

TRUE, AND DOCUMENTED

Unlike most claims in this book, this one needs almost no argument. The administrative case was real, but the Home Secretary of the Government of India wrote, in an official note in February 1904, that dividing Bengal would make it pull in several different ways and that this was **one of the merits of the scheme**. The line was then drawn to create a Muslim majority province rather than simply two workable ones.

What is **not** true is that Bengali Muslims were tricked or bought. They supported it because it gave them a majority province, which was a rational choice for a community that had been shut out of the professions. That is the whole tragedy of this period in one sentence: the British offered a real benefit, and the price of taking it was a precedent.

WHY THIS CHAPTER MATTERS MORE THAN IT LOOKS

Everything that happens in 1947 has a rehearsal here. A province divided on religious lines. A Muslim majority east and a Hindu majority west. A promise of protection through separation. Mass agitation on the other side. Bengal even gets partitioned a second time in 1947, and its eastern half becomes a separate country twice, first as East Pakistan and then in 1971 as Bangladesh. When somebody tells you Partition was a sudden idea from the 1940s, remember 1905.

CHAPTER THREE

Simla and Dhaka: How the Muslim League Was Born

Within fourteen months of the Bengal partition, Muslim India acquired a political programme and a political party. Both were born in 1906, and both are the subject of a long running argument about who started them.

The Simla Deputation, 1 October 1906

A group of thirty five prominent Muslims, led by the Aga Khan III, was received by the Viceroy Lord Minto at the Viceregal Lodge in Simla. They presented an address, and they asked for four things.

1. **Separate electorates.** Muslims should vote for Muslim candidates in seats reserved for Muslims, in local bodies, provincial councils and universities.
2. **Representation above their numbers.** Their share of seats should not be fixed by population alone.
3. **Weightage for "political importance".** Their argument was that Muslims should be weighed, not merely counted, because of their history as former rulers and their contribution to the army.
4. **Reserved posts** in government service and on the bench.

Minto's reply was warm. He assured the deputation that Muslim political rights and interests would be safeguarded in any administrative reorganisation. That assurance is the seed of the 1909 Act.

The "command performance" charge

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"The Simla Deputation was staged by the British. The Principal of Aligarh College, an Englishman, organised it. It was, in the words of a Muslim leader himself, a command performance. The Muslim League was not born, it was manufactured in a British office."

The phrase comes from a real source. Maulana Mohammad Ali, one of the most important Muslim leaders of the Khilafat period, used the words "command performance" about the Simla Deputation in his presidential address to the Congress session at Kakinada in 1923.

So the phrase is authentic. Is the charge?

What supports it. William Archbold, the English Principal of the Aligarh college, was involved in the correspondence that set up the meeting. Minto's reply was suspiciously prepared and enthusiastic. And the British had, as Part 1 showed, a clear strategic interest in a separate Muslim political voice. It fitted their policy perfectly.

What weakens it. When historians traced the correspondence, the first move came from the Indian side, not the British one. Nawab Mohsin ul Mulk, a close associate of Sir Sayyid and the secretary of the Aligarh college, wrote to Archbold asking him to request that the Viceroy receive a Muslim deputation. Archbold acted as the channel, which is exactly what an English principal with access to Simla would be used for. No document has been produced showing the British ordering the deputation into existence.

And a point of simple logic. The demand did not need to be invented by anybody. Muslim leaders had watched the Bengal agitation, they had read the census, and they could do the arithmetic. A permanent minority in a head counting system will always ask for a guaranteed share. That demand would have appeared with or without Mr Archbold.

VERDICT ON "THE SIMLA DEPUTATION WAS A BRITISH COMMAND PERFORMANCE"

HALF TRUE

TRUE that the British wanted exactly this outcome, that an English college principal was the channel through which the meeting was arranged, and that the Viceroy's welcoming reply was prepared in advance.

NOT PROVEN that the British initiated it. The documented first move came from Nawab Mohsin ul Mulk.

The accurate statement: it was not a British invention, it was a **British opportunity**. Indian Muslim leaders walked through a door, and the British had spent thirty years leaving that door open. Both halves of that sentence are needed.

The founding of the All India Muslim League, 30 December 1906

Three months later, at Dhaka, the annual meeting of the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference passed a resolution moved by Nawab Salimullah Khan of Dhaka, seconded by Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maulana Muhammad Ali and Maulana Zafar Ali. The All India Muslim League was founded.

Its declared aims tell you a lot. In its earliest form, the League existed to promote loyalty to the British government, to protect and advance the political rights of Indian Muslims, and to prevent hostility towards other communities. That third aim is genuine and is usually forgotten.

Two things about this founding are worth holding on to for later parts.

- **It was an elite body.** Nawabs, landlords, Aga Khans, college men. It had almost no mass following. In 1937, thirty one years later, it would be crushed in the elections. Its transformation into a mass movement happens between 1937 and 1946, and that is one of the most important stories in this book.
- **It did not ask for a country.** Not in 1906, not in 1916, not in 1930. The Pakistan demand is thirty four years away. What the League asked for in 1906 was a guaranteed share inside one India.

CHAPTER FOUR

1909: The Year the Road Forked

If you asked me to pick the single most damaging decision in this entire history, I would not choose 1947, or 1940, or 1905. I would choose the Indian Councils Act of 1909.

What the Act did

The Indian Councils Act of 1909, known as the Morley Minto Reforms after John Morley in London and Lord Minto in India, expanded the legislative councils and allowed a limited number of elected Indian members for the first time.

And it created **separate electorates** for Muslims.

WHAT A SEPARATE ELECTORATE ACTUALLY MEANS

Imagine a town with 100 voters, 75 Hindus and 25 Muslims, electing four representatives.

Under a normal system: all 100 vote together for all four seats. To win, a candidate must please as many people as possible, so he has to appeal across religion. A Hindu candidate needs Muslim votes to be safe. A Muslim candidate can win if enough Hindus back him.

Under separate electorates: three seats are Hindu seats, voted for only by Hindus. One seat is a Muslim seat, voted for only by Muslims. Now a Hindu candidate never needs a single Muslim vote, and a Muslim candidate never needs a single Hindu vote.

Ask yourself what kind of speech wins each election. In the first system, the winning speech is "we are all this town's people". In the second, the winning speech is "I will defend our community harder than my rival will". The system does not just measure opinion. It rewards one kind of politician and starves another.

Why this was worse than it looked at the time

In 1909 this seemed like a small technical concession to a nervous minority. It was not. It did four things at once.

1. **It made religion a legal category for voting.** The state now had to maintain a list of who was Muslim and who was not, in order to run an election. Your religion was no longer only a legal box in a courtroom, as Part 1 described. It was now your political address.
2. **It removed the reward for compromise.** This is the deepest damage. Every functioning multi community democracy depends on politicians needing votes from people unlike themselves. Separate electorates deleted that need by law.
3. **It froze the community as the unit of politics.** Not the district, not the class, not the trade, not the ideology. The community.
4. **It set a precedent that everybody then had to claim.** Once one group had a guaranteed share, every other group would be foolish not to ask. Sikhs got separate electorates in 1919. Christians, Anglo Indians and Europeans followed. In 1932 the Communal Award offered

them to the Depressed Classes as well, and that produces the Gandhi and Ambedkar confrontation of Part 4. The machine, once switched on, kept running.

Who is to blame for it?

Let us be even handed, because there is blame in three directions.

The British designed and enacted it, knowing exactly what it would do. Morley in London had private doubts about the whole scheme of separate representation, but it went through, and Minto in India regarded the securing of Muslim loyalty as a considerable achievement.

The Muslim League asked for it, campaigned for it and defended it for the next forty years. It was a rational demand for a minority that feared permanent defeat. It was also the demand that made a shared political nation structurally impossible.

The Congress opposed it in 1909, and then accepted it seven years later. That is Chapter 5, and it is the part of this story that Congress supporters find hardest to face.

VERDICT ON 1909

TRUE THAT THIS IS THE STRUCTURAL TURNING POINT

Many historians, Indian and Pakistani and British, converge on this. Separate electorates did not make Partition certain, and this book will not pretend they did. Plenty of chances to change course came later and were missed by real people making real choices.

But 1909 is the moment when religion stopped being a fact about Indians and became the **legal unit of Indian political life**. After 1909, every negotiation about India's future had to be a negotiation between communities, because there was no longer any other way to be represented.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Years of Unity, and How Congress Joined the Machine

If the road forked in 1909, the next seven years show that a fork is not a wall. This is the period when Hindu and Muslim politics came closest to merging. It is also the period when the Congress made the concession that it could never take back.

Why Muslim opinion turned against the British

Three things happened in quick succession.

- **1911, the annulment of the Bengal partition.** As Chapter 2 explained, Muslim leaders in East Bengal had backed the British and were then abandoned. Loyalty had been shown to be a bad investment.
- **1911 to 1913, the Balkan Wars and the attacks on the Ottoman Empire.** The Ottoman Sultan was also the Caliph, the symbolic head of Sunni Islam. Britain and its allies were on the other side. For a great many Indian Muslims this made Britain not a protector but a threat to their faith.
- **1913, the Kanpur mosque incident.** The British demolished part of a mosque in Kanpur to widen a road. The shooting of protesters that followed produced fury across Muslim India and radicalised a generation of younger leaders, including Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Azad.

The result was that in 1913 the Muslim League changed its own constitution and adopted self government for India as its goal, and a young Bombay lawyer who was already a rising Congress figure agreed to join it while remaining in the Congress. His name was Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

THE JINNAH NOBODY EXPECTS

In this period Jinnah was a Congressman, a follower of Gokhale, a man who wore Savile Row suits, spoke almost no Urdu, drank, ate what he liked and had little interest in religious observance. Gokhale called him the best ambassador of Hindu and Muslim unity. In 1913 he joined the Muslim League only after making it clear that his loyalty to the national cause came first. The man who created Pakistan spent the first half of his political life as the leading advocate of a united India. We will follow that transformation carefully in Part 9, because how it happened is one of the central questions of this book.

The Lucknow Pact, December 1916

In December 1916 the Congress and the Muslim League held their annual sessions in the same city, Lucknow, and signed a joint agreement. Tilak led for the Congress. Jinnah led for the League. They agreed on a common demand for self government and put it to the British together.

It was, on the surface, the greatest moment of Hindu and Muslim political unity in the whole colonial period. Two parties, one demand, one platform.

And the price the Congress paid for it was this: **the Congress formally accepted separate electorates.**

Not only accepted. The Pact went further. It agreed that Muslims should have more seats than their population share in provinces where they were a minority, such as the United Provinces, in exchange for accepting fewer than their share in Punjab and Bengal where they were a majority. This is called weightage. The Congress had now signed a document that treated Indians as members of communities with negotiated quotas.

VERDICT ON THE LUCKNOW PACT

A GENUINE ACHIEVEMENT THAT DID PERMANENT DAMAGE

TRUE that it produced real unity and the strongest joint demand yet made on the British.

ALSO TRUE that by accepting separate electorates, the Congress legitimised the exact device it had condemned in 1909. After 1916 the Congress could never again argue that communal representation was wrong in principle. It had signed for it.

The accurate statement: 1909 built the machine and 1916 is when the other side agreed to operate it. Anyone who blames only the British or only the League for communal electorates has not read the Lucknow Pact.

Six years after Lucknow, in 1922, the unity built here would collapse. That story, which runs through the Khilafat movement, the Non Cooperation Movement, Chauri Chaura and the Moplah rising, is Part 3.

CHAPTER SIX

Who Else Said "Two Nations"? The Uncomfortable List

This chapter jumps ahead in time on purpose. Each of these moments will be examined properly in later parts. I have put them together here so that you can see the sequence in one place, because the sequence is the finding.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"The two nation theory was a Muslim idea. Muslims said Hindus and Muslims are two nations and cannot live together, and that is why India was partitioned. Hindu leaders always wanted one united India."

Here is the record, in date order. Read the dates carefully.

DATE	WHO	WHAT WAS ACTUALLY SAID OR PROPOSED
16 March 1888	Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Meerut	"Two nations, the Mahomedans and the Hindus, could sit on the same throne and remain equal in power? Most certainly not." The Urdu word is <i>qaum</i> , community. No territory or state is proposed.
14 December 1923	Lala Lajpat Rai , in <i>The Tribune</i>	Proposed "a definite partition of India into a Muslim India and non Muslim India". A Hindu Mahasabha leader and Congress veteran, publicly proposing partition.
November and December 1924	Lala Lajpat Rai , series in <i>The Tribune</i>	Argued that since Punjabi Muslims would not grant weightage to Hindus and Sikhs, Punjab itself should be divided into Muslim majority and Hindu majority portions. This is the Punjab partition plan of 1947, proposed twenty three years early, by a Hindu leader.
29 December 1930	Muhammad Iqbal , Allahabad, presidential address to the Muslim League	"The formation of a consolidated North West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North West India." Note the words he used: <i>self government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire</i> . He described a Muslim India <i>within</i> India.
28 January 1933	Choudhry Rahmat Ali , Cambridge, pamphlet <i>Now or Never</i>	Coined the name PAKSTAN, from Punjab, Afghania, Kashmir, Sindh and the last syllable of Baluchistan. The "i" was added later for pronunciation. He was a student with no party and no following. The Muslim League leadership dismissed the idea at the time as impracticable.
December 1937	V. D. Savarkar , Ahmedabad, presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha	"India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main, the Hindus and the Moslems, in India." And: "there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India."

DATE	WHO	WHAT WAS ACTUALLY SAID OR PROPOSED
23 March 1940	Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Lahore, the Lahore Resolution	The Muslim League formally demands that Muslim majority areas be grouped into "independent states". The word Pakistan does not appear in the resolution.

What this table actually shows

Three findings, and I want to state each of them carefully.

Finding one: a Hindu leader proposed partition first, in print, in 1923

Lala Lajpat Rai was not a marginal figure. He was one of the three leaders of the Extremist wing of the Congress, a national hero who would die in 1928 from injuries received in a police lathi charge, the man whose death Bhagat Singh set out to avenge. And in December 1923, in a newspaper, he proposed dividing India into a Muslim India and a non Muslim India, and the following year he proposed dividing Punjab.

He is not usually named as a father of the two nation theory. On the documentary record he proposed the practical partition scheme seventeen years before the Muslim League did.

To be fair to him, his motive was the reverse of Jinnah's. He was arguing from despair about communal violence and from a belief that Hindus and Sikhs in a Muslim majority Punjab would be crushed. He was not building a nation. He was trying to protect one. But a proposal is a proposal, and it was published under his name.

Finding two: Savarkar stated the two nation theory as Hindu Mahasabha policy in 1937, before Jinnah stated it as Muslim League policy in 1940

The words are on the record from his presidential address at Ahmedabad. The Mahasabha under his leadership held that India contained two nations, the Hindus and the Muslims. Jinnah made the equivalent claim the policy of the Muslim League three years later.

Savarkar's defenders make an argument that deserves to be heard, and I will put it at full strength in Part 4 where this belongs. In short, they say he was describing a fact rather than making a demand, that he wanted one undivided country in which Hindus were recognised as the nation and Muslims as a community living within it, and that he opposed Partition to his last day, which is true. The counter argument is that once you concede the premise that there are two nations, you have handed the other side its entire case, and Jinnah quoted exactly this kind of Hindu nationalist statement back at Congress negotiators.

Both of those arguments are serious. I am not settling them here. What is not arguable is the date.

Finding three: the men usually named as the architects were often not asking for what we think

Iqbal in 1930 asked for a consolidated Muslim state in the north west, explicitly discussing it as something that could exist *within the British Empire*, and elsewhere in the same address he spoke

of Muslim India within India. He died in 1938, two years before the Lahore Resolution. Reading him as the man who demanded Pakistan requires ignoring his own words about what he meant.

Rahmat Ali in 1933 was a student in Cambridge printing a pamphlet at his own expense. The idea was treated as fantasy by the very leaders it was addressed to. He got the name adopted and almost nothing else. He later attacked Jinnah bitterly, felt betrayed by the Pakistan that was actually created, and died in Cambridge in 1951 in poverty.

VERDICT ON "THE TWO NATION THEORY WAS A MUSLIM IDEA"

FALSE AS STATED

TRUE that the Muslim League turned it into a political demand for a separate state, that the League alone campaigned for Partition, and that Pakistan was created on that demand. Responsibility for the demand itself sits with the League.

FALSE that only Muslims held or expressed the idea that Hindus and Muslims were two distinct nations. Sir Sayyid used the word *qaum* in 1888. Lala Lajpat Rai proposed partitioning India in 1923 and Punjab in 1924. Savarkar made two nations the stated position of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937. Jinnah made it the stated position of the Muslim League in 1940.

The accurate statement: the two nation idea grew on **both sides at once**, out of the same census arithmetic and the same electoral machine, and each side pointed at the other's version as proof that it was right.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Two men are in an argument. The first says, "You will never treat me fairly, so give me my own room." The second says, "You are right, we are two different people, and I will never treat you as the same." Then each one points at the other and says, see, he started it. Both are telling the truth about the other man. Neither is telling the truth about himself.

HOW TO CHECK ANY OF THIS YOURSELF IN FIVE MINUTES

Every document in the table above is online and free. The Meerut speech of 1888, Iqbal's Allahabad address of 1930 and Rahmat Ali's pamphlet of 1933 are all available in full text on university and archive websites, and I have listed them in the sources.

So when somebody sends you a quote from this period, do three things. Ask for the date and the place. Search a distinctive phrase from the quote in quotation marks. Then find the paragraph before it and the paragraph after it. In my experience roughly half of the quotes circulating about these men fail at step one, because no date and place exist. Of the ones that survive, a good number change meaning completely at step three.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

By the end of 1916 the pieces have moved a long way from where Part 1 left them.

- The arithmetic problem has been named in public, by Sir Sayyid in 1888, and the answer he chose was loyalty to the British rather than bargaining with Indians.
- India has been partitioned once already, in Bengal in 1905, on lines drawn so that religion and province matched, with a British official noting in an internal file that division was one of the merits of the scheme.
- That partition has been reversed by mass agitation, teaching Congress that pressure works and teaching Muslim leaders that loyalty does not.
- Muslim India has a party, founded in 1906, elite and loyalist and tiny, asking for a guaranteed share inside one country.
- And in 1909 the British made religion the legal unit of the vote itself, which removed forever the reward for building alliances across community.
- In 1916 the Congress signed up to that same system at Lucknow, in exchange for a moment of real unity.

What still does not exist in 1916 is any demand for a separate country. Not from Jinnah, who is at this moment the leading voice of unity. Not from the League. Not from anybody.

What exists is a structure. And a structure quietly decides what kind of politics can grow inside it.

In Part 3, a lawyer returns from South Africa, takes over the Congress within four years, and links the national movement to a religious cause in a way that has been argued about ever since.

Timeline for Part 2

DATE	EVENT
1817	Sayyid Ahmad Khan born in Delhi.
1858	He publishes <i>The Causes of the Indian Revolt</i> , blaming British policy for 1857.
1875	Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College founded at Aligarh.
January 1883	Patna speech: Hindus and Muslims are "the two beautiful and lustrous eyes" of India.
27 January 1884	Gurdaspur speech: "Hindu and Muslim is but a religious word."
1885	Indian National Congress founded.
1887	Lucknow speech against the Congress.
16 March 1888	Meerut speech. The "two nations on the same throne" passage.

DATE	EVENT
1898	Sayyid Ahmad Khan dies.
7 February 1904	Risley note: "Bengal united is a power. Bengal divided will pull in several different ways."
20 July 1905	Curzon announces the partition of Bengal.
16 October 1905	Partition of Bengal takes effect. Swadeshi and boycott begin. Tagore's rakhi protest.
1 October 1906	Simla Deputation. Thirty five Muslim leaders led by the Aga Khan meet Lord Minto.
30 December 1906	All India Muslim League founded at Dhaka.
1907	Congress splits at Surat between Moderates and Extremists.
1909	Indian Councils Act. Separate electorates created for Muslims.
12 December 1911	Partition of Bengal annulled at the Delhi Durbar. Capital moved to Delhi.
1912 to 1913	Balkan Wars and the Kanpur mosque incident turn Muslim opinion against Britain.
1913	Muslim League adopts self government as its goal. Jinnah joins the League.
December 1916	Lucknow Pact. Congress accepts separate electorates and weightage.
1919	Separate electorates extended to Sikhs.
14 December 1923	Lala Lajpat Rai proposes partition of India into Muslim and non Muslim India.
1924	Lala Lajpat Rai proposes the partition of Punjab.
29 December 1930	Iqbal's Allahabad address.
28 January 1933	Rahmat Ali's pamphlet coins the name PAKISTAN.
December 1937	Savarkar's Ahmedabad address states the two nation position for the Hindu Mahasabha.
23 March 1940	Lahore Resolution of the Muslim League.

Word list

Qaum	An Urdu word meaning community, people or nation. In nineteenth century usage it usually meant community. Nearly every place where Sir Sayyid's translated speeches say "nation", the original word is qaum.
Separate electorate	A voting system in which only members of one religion may vote for the seats reserved for that religion. Introduced for Muslims in 1909.

Weightage	Giving a community more seats than its population share, usually as protection where it is a minority. Agreed in the Lucknow Pact of 1916.
Swadeshi	"Of our own country." A campaign to buy Indian goods and boycott British ones, born in Bengal in 1905.
Boycott	Organised refusal to buy goods or use institutions, used as a political weapon.
Moderates and Extremists	The two wings of the Congress that split at Surat in 1907. Moderates wanted petitions and gradual reform. Extremists wanted boycott and confrontation.
Deputation	A delegation that formally presents a request to an authority.
Viceroy	The British monarch's representative and head of the government in India.
Durbar	A grand ceremonial court assembly. The Delhi Durbar of 1911 was held for King George V.
Caliph	The symbolic head of the worldwide Sunni Muslim community. The Ottoman Sultan held the title until 1924. See Part 3.
Hindu Mahasabha	A Hindu nationalist political organisation, founded in 1915 and most influential in the 1930s and 1940s under Savarkar.

Sources used in Part 2

- Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, speech at Meerut, 16 March 1888, in *Sir Syed Ahmed on the Present State of Indian Politics* (Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1888), pages 29 to 53. Full English text hosted by Professor Frances W. Pritchett, Columbia University, with the note on qaum and nation.
- Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, speech at Lucknow, 28 September 1887, same collection.
- Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Patna speech of January 1883 and Gurdaspur speech of 27 January 1884, as recorded in collections of his speeches.
- Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, 1858.
- Herbert Risley, Home Department note of 7 February 1904, quoted in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*, and in standard accounts of the Bengal partition.
- Banglapedia entries on the Partition of Bengal 1905 and on the Simla Deputation, for provincial populations, dates and participants.
- Maulana Mohammad Ali, presidential address, Indian National Congress, Kakinada session, 1923, for the "command performance" phrase.
- Bimal Prasad's research on the origins of the Simla Deputation, tracing the initiative to Nawab Mohsin ul Mulk's letter to William Archbold.
- Indian Councils Act 1909, text and official summaries of the Morley Minto Reforms.
- Text of the Lucknow Pact, December 1916, and Jinnah's Lucknow presidential address of 1916.
- Muhammad Iqbal, presidential address to the All India Muslim League, Allahabad, 29 December 1930, full text.
- Choudhry Rahmat Ali, *Now or Never: Are We to Live or Perish Forever?*, pamphlet, 28 January 1933, full text.

- V. D. Savarkar, presidential address, Hindu Mahasabha, Ahmedabad, 1937, as published in the Mahasabha proceedings.
- Lala Lajpat Rai, articles in *The Tribune*, 14 December 1923 and November to December 1924.

COMING NEXT

Part 3: Gandhi Arrives. The South Africa years and the charge that he was a racist. The Khilafat movement and the question that will not go away: was linking the national struggle to a Turkish Caliph the single greatest blunder of the freedom movement, or the only way to bring Muslim India into it? The Moplah rising of 1921 and what Gandhi said about it. Chauri Chaura and whether freedom was thrown away in 1922. And why the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha grew out of exactly these years.

Part 2 of a twelve part series. Researched, written and compiled by Lovepreet Singh.

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*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
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PART THREE OF TWELVE

Gandhi Arrives

*South Africa, Khilafat, Malabar and Chauri Chaura: the four charges
that are still thrown at Gandhi a hundred years later*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the part where the arguing really begins.

Everything in Parts 1 and 2 happened before most of the famous names arrive. From here on, every chapter is about a person somebody worships and somebody else despises. And I have noticed something while researching this part that I want to warn you about in advance.

The material on these years is the most heavily mined in all of Indian history. There are entire websites that exist only to collect damaging sentences about Gandhi, and entire websites that exist only to explain those sentences away. Both sides quote real documents. Both sides leave out the paragraph that would spoil the effect.

So in this part I have done something extra. Where a quotation is famous, I have tried to find its date and its publication. Where I could find it, I have said so. Where I could not verify a quote that circulates everywhere, **I have said that too, and I have kept it in the book with a warning label rather than quietly dropping it.** A quote that cannot be traced is itself an important fact, and hiding it would make me exactly the kind of writer this book is arguing against.

You will find in these pages things about Gandhi that are genuinely damaging and are genuinely true. You will also find famous accusations that fall apart the moment you check the date. I have printed both. That is the deal I made with you in Part 1.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART THREE

RECAP	Where Parts 1 and 2 left us
CHAPTER 1	The South Africa years and the racism charge
CHAPTER 2	What Gandhi actually invented, and why it worked
CHAPTER 3	The Khilafat gamble: masterstroke or original sin?
CHAPTER 4	Malabar, August 1921: the hardest chapter in this book
CHAPTER 5	Chauri Chaura: did he throw away freedom?
CHAPTER 6	What grew in the ruins, 1922 to 1930
CLOSING	Timeline, word list, sources, what comes next

RECAP

Where Parts One and Two Left Us

One page, so you can start here if you need to.

British rule turned religion from a fact about Indians into the operating system of Indian public life. Religion became a legal category in court, a box on the census form, and finally, in 1909, the basis of the vote itself through separate electorates.

In 1905 the British partitioned Bengal on lines that matched religion to province, and a Home Secretary wrote in an internal note that a divided Bengal pulling in different directions was one of the merits of the scheme. Mass agitation reversed that partition in 1911, which taught Congress that pressure works and taught Muslim leaders that loyalty to the British buys nothing.

Muslim India got a party in 1906, elite and loyalist, asking for a guaranteed share inside one country. In 1916 at Lucknow the Congress signed up to separate electorates in exchange for a moment of real unity.

Nobody yet wanted a separate country. The two nation idea existed as a description in several mouths, Hindu and Muslim, but not as a demand.

Part 3 covers 1915 to 1930. In these fifteen years the freedom movement becomes a mass movement for the first time, and the communal problem becomes a mass problem for the first time. Those two things happen together, and whether that is a coincidence is the argument of this part.

CHAPTER ONE

The South Africa Years and the Racism Charge

Gandhi spent twenty one years in South Africa, from 1893 to 1915. He arrived a nervous barrister who could barely speak in court. He left as a political inventor. He also said things in those years that are ugly and indefensible, and we are going to read them.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Gandhi was a racist. He called Black Africans kaffirs, demanded that Indians be kept separate from them, and fought only for Indian rights while ignoring African rights. He is a hero in India only because Indians do not read what he wrote in South Africa."

What he did there

He went in 1893 on a one year contract for a Gujarati merchant firm. He stayed twenty one years. Along the way he was thrown off a train at Pietermaritzburg for refusing to leave a first class compartment, an event he later described as the turning point of his life.

He founded the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. In 1906, at a mass meeting in the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg, he launched the method he would later call satyagraha, against a law requiring Indians to register and be fingerprinted. Thousands of Indians courted arrest, including Gandhi, repeatedly. In 1913 he led a march of over two thousand Indian miners and their families across a provincial border in deliberate defiance of the law. The government eventually negotiated. Gandhi had proved, on a small scale, that organised voluntary suffering could move a state.

Now the quotes

These are real. They come from his own newspaper and his own petitions. I am not going to soften them.

- He argued that Indians were "much superior, in capacity, reliability and obedience, to the average Kaffir".
- In 1904, opposing a plan by Johannesburg municipal authorities to house Africans alongside Indians, he wrote: "Mixing of the Kaffirs with the Indians, I feel most strongly. I think it is very unfair to the Indian population."
- In 1905 he complained that "of all places in Johannesburg, the Indian location should be chosen for dumping down all kaffirs of the town".
- He objected to Indian prisoners being housed with African prisoners in Johannesburg jail.

The word he used, which I have printed as he wrote it because sanitising it would be dishonest, is today one of the most offensive words in South Africa. In his time it was in common administrative use, but that only explains its currency, not the argument he built with it. His argument was

that Indians deserved better treatment *because they were not Africans*. That is a claim of racial hierarchy, and no amount of context makes it something else.

The historians Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed set this out at length in *The South African Gandhi*, published in 2015. Their central charge is not just the language. It is that Gandhi deliberately kept the Indian struggle separate from the African one, and that he sought inclusion for Indians inside the empire rather than the end of racial rule.

The defence, at its strongest

Being fair means putting the other case properly, so here it is.

- **He was a colonial subject arguing inside a colonial framework.** His early strategy was to hold the British to their own 1858 promise of equal treatment for all subjects of the Queen. That argument only worked if you accepted the empire's terms. It was a lawyer's tactic, and it was a morally cheap one, but it was not a programme of racial supremacy.
- **He changed, and the change is documented.** In a speech in Johannesburg in 1908 he described a future South Africa in which all the races mingled and produced a civilisation the world had not yet seen. By the 1920s he was writing that the disabilities of Africans were far worse than those of Indians. In 1946 he supported the Africans in their struggle and told an American visitor that it may be through the Black people that the unadulterated message of nonviolence would be delivered to the world.
- **People who had every reason to reject him did not.** Nelson Mandela, Albert Luthuli and the African National Congress drew on his methods and honoured him openly. That does not make the quotes acceptable. It does mean that Black South African leaders weighed the whole record and reached a judgement.
- **During the Bambatha rebellion in 1906** he raised an Indian stretcher bearer corps on the British side, which is the worst part of the record politically. But his own account, and the corps' work, involved carrying and nursing wounded Zulus whom white orderlies refused to touch. He wrote later that the experience shook him.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI WAS A RACIST"

TRUE OF THE YOUNG GANDHI. MISLEADING AS A DESCRIPTION OF HIS LIFE.

TRUE that between roughly 1894 and 1908 he wrote and petitioned in openly racially hierarchical terms, used a word that was and is a slur, and argued for separating Indians from Africans. These are his words, in his newspaper, under his name.

FALSE that this was his settled or final position. The record of the next forty years contradicts it, and the change is visible in his own writing from 1908 onwards.

What both sides get wrong: defenders should stop pretending the quotes are fabricated or harmless, and prosecutors should stop pretending a man's views at thirty five are his views at seventy five. A person who changes is not a hypocrite. A person who refuses to change is something worse.

A TEST YOU CAN APPLY TO ANY LEADER

Ask not "did he ever say something terrible" but "did he end up better or worse than where he started, and did he say so himself". Almost every figure in this book fails the first test, because almost everybody in 1900 held opinions that would end a career today. The second test separates them sharply, and we will apply it to Nehru, Jinnah, Savarkar and Ambedkar too.

CHAPTER TWO

What Gandhi Actually Invented, and Why It Worked

Before we test the charges against him, we should be clear about what he did, because "Gandhi did nothing" is a claim we will demolish with numbers in Part 7 and with structure right here.

He came home to a movement that could not reach ordinary people

Gandhi returned to India in January 1915. His political mentor Gokhale told him to spend a year travelling and saying nothing. He did.

What he found was a Congress that was thirty years old, respectable, and almost entirely a body of English speaking lawyers, professors and journalists. It passed resolutions. It sent petitions. Its annual session was a few thousand men in coats. A peasant in Bihar had never heard of it and would not have understood a word of its proceedings.

Satyagraha in plain words

The word means holding firmly to truth. In practice it is a method with four moving parts.

1. **Break an unjust law openly, not secretly.** Announce in advance what you will do and when.
2. **Accept the punishment without resisting.** Do not run, do not hit back, do not hide.
3. **Do it in large numbers**, so that the state must either back down or fill its jails with people who have harmed nobody.
4. **Keep the door open** so the opponent can concede without humiliation.

Why did this work against the British in particular? Because the British ruled India with a tiny number of people and a very large story. The story was that they governed by law and consent, for the good of Indians. Violence lets a government use that story: rebels are criminals, and shooting criminals is order. Mass nonviolent lawbreaking attacks the story directly. The government must beat unarmed people in front of witnesses, and every beating destroys the justification for its own presence.

It was also, and this is rarely said, a method that suited India's actual condition. Indians had no weapons, no army and no money. What they had was numbers. Satyagraha is a strategy that converts the one resource you have into pressure.

The three experiments that proved it, 1917 to 1918

WHERE	WHAT	RESULT
Champaran, Bihar, 1917	Indigo planters forced tenants to grow indigo on part of their land on ruinous terms. Gandhi went, was ordered to leave, refused, and offered himself for arrest.	The government backed off and appointed a committee with Gandhi on it. The system was abolished. His first Indian victory, won without a single act of violence.

WHERE	WHAT	RESULT
Ahmedabad, 1918	A mill workers' dispute over wages. Gandhi fasted to hold the strike together and to hold the workers to nonviolence.	Settlement with an increase. It also introduced the fast as a political instrument, which would become one of the most argued about things he ever did.
Kheda, Gujarat, 1918	Crops failed. The government refused to suspend the land revenue. Gandhi and Sardar Patel organised a refusal to pay.	The government quietly conceded. It also brought Vallabhbhai Patel into the movement, which changes everything later.

1919: Rowlatt and Jallianwala Bagh

In March 1919 the government passed the Rowlatt Act, allowing detention without trial. Gandhi called a nationwide hartal. On 13 April 1919 in Amritsar, Brigadier General Reginald Dyer marched troops into the enclosed garden of Jallianwala Bagh where a large crowd had gathered, blocked the only wide exit and ordered them to fire on the crowd without warning. Firing continued for about ten minutes until the ammunition was nearly exhausted. Official figures gave 379 dead. Indian estimates were far higher. Martial law followed in Punjab, with public floggings and the notorious crawling order.

The importance of Jallianwala Bagh is not only the horror. It is that it destroyed the British story about themselves in the minds of millions of loyal Indians in a single afternoon. Rabindranath Tagore returned his knighthood. Moderates who had spent their lives asking politely stopped asking.

What he did to the Congress in 1920

This is the least dramatic and most important thing in the chapter. At the Nagpur session in December 1920 the Congress constitution was rewritten, largely on Gandhi's design.

- **Membership cost four annas a year.** A peasant could join.
- **Provincial committees were redrawn on language lines** rather than on British administrative boundaries, so that Congress work could be done in the language people actually spoke.
- **A permanent Working Committee** of fifteen was created, so the party had an executive that functioned all year instead of a body that met once a year.
- **Village and district committees** were built beneath the provincial ones, creating a chain from a hamlet to the national leadership.

Within a year Congress membership went from a few thousand to millions. Whatever you think of Gandhi's decisions, this is the machine that fought the next twenty seven years, and he built it.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Before 1920 the Congress was a debating club that wrote letters to the government. After 1920 it was an organisation with branches in villages, a subscription a farmer could afford, and a method any illiterate person could take part in: sit down, do not hit back, go to jail. That is what Gandhi built. You can hate his decisions and still have to explain that machine.

CHAPTER THREE

The Khilafat Gamble: Masterstroke or Original Sin?

This is the first of the two great charges in Part 3, and in my view it is the more serious one, although it is the less famous.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Gandhi's biggest blunder was Khilafat. He tied India's freedom movement to a Turkish king's religious title, which had nothing to do with India. He taught Indian Muslims to organise politically as Muslims, he made religion the fuel of mass politics, and he got nothing in return. Within a year of Khilafat, Malabar burned. Within four years the Turks themselves abolished the Caliphate and the whole thing collapsed. Everything after that, the riots of the 1920s, the Muslim League's revival, Partition itself, flows from this decision."

What Khilafat actually was

The Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul also held the title of Caliph, the symbolic head of Sunni Muslims worldwide. Turkey had fought on the losing side in the First World War. The victorious Allies, Britain foremost among them, were dismembering the Ottoman Empire, and the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 stripped it further.

For many Indian Muslims this was not foreign news. Britain was destroying the institution they regarded as the guardian of the holy places and the symbolic centre of their faith, and Indian Muslim soldiers had helped Britain do it. The Khilafat movement, led by the brothers Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali, demanded that Britain preserve the Caliph's position and the holy places.

Gandhi's decision

Gandhi did not merely sympathise. He took the Congress into a formal alliance with the Khilafat committees, and at the special Calcutta session in September 1920 and then at Nagpur in December 1920 he made Khilafat and Punjab the two stated grievances of the Non Cooperation Movement. He accepted the presidency of the All India Khilafat Conference. He wrote and spoke about the Caliph's cause constantly.

His stated reasoning was consistent and he never hid it. He believed a wrong done to Muslims was a wrong done to India, that helping a neighbour in his own grief without asking anything back was the only honest basis for friendship, and that this was a chance no one would get twice to bind the two communities together in a shared struggle.

The case that it was a masterstroke

- **It worked, at first, spectacularly.** 1920 to 1922 was the largest and most united mass movement India had ever seen. Muslim and Hindu leaders shared platforms. Muslims joined Congress in numbers never seen before or, arguably, since.
- **The alternative was worse.** Muslim political anger in 1919 was going to be expressed somewhere. Gandhi's choice was whether it flowed into a national movement alongside Hindus or into a separate channel. He chose to bring it inside.
- **It was consistent with his whole philosophy.** He did not bargain. He supported a cause he considered just, for free. Ask yourself what Muslim leaders would have concluded if the Congress had told them that their grievance was not India's business.

The case that it was the original sin

- **The cause was not Indian.** Indian peasants were asked to boycott British goods over the constitutional status of a Turkish monarch. That is a genuinely strange foundation for a national movement, and Jinnah, of all people, said so at the time. Jinnah opposed the whole approach, warned that it would lead to disaster, and resigned from the Congress at Nagpur in 1920 over it. Read that sentence again. In 1920 Jinnah was the constitutionalist warning against mixing religion into mass politics, and Gandhi was the one doing the mixing.
- **It taught a lesson that could not be untaught.** Before 1920, Muslim politics in India was elite and constitutional. Khilafat made it a mass religious movement with mosques, preachers and religious symbols as its organising network. That network did not dissolve when the cause died. It was there, ready, for whoever came next.
- **It was a religious cause, so it legitimised religion as the fuel of politics for everybody.** Hindu mobilisation on religious lines grew in direct response, which is Chapter 6.
- **The hijrat disaster.** In 1920, some religious leaders declared India a land where Islam could not be practised freely and called for migration. Around eighteen thousand Muslim peasants, mostly from Sindh and the North West Frontier, sold their land and walked to Afghanistan. Afghanistan closed the border. Most straggled back, destitute, having lost everything. Gandhi did not order this and did not endorse it, but it happened inside the atmosphere he had helped create.
- **And then the cause evaporated.** On 1 November 1922 the Turks abolished the Sultanate. On 3 March 1924 Mustafa Kemal Ataturk abolished the Caliphate itself. The Turks did not want a Caliph. Indian Muslims had been mobilised, at enormous cost, to defend an institution that the country concerned dismantled by its own choice.

Weighing it

Here is where I have to be careful, because it is easy to judge 1920 with the knowledge of 1947.

In 1920 Gandhi could not know that Ataturk would abolish the Caliphate. Nobody could. He also could not know that Malabar would explode. What he could see was a real chance, probably the best chance anyone ever had, to fuse the two communities in a single struggle, and he took it.

But there is a criticism that survives even after you allow for hindsight, and I think it is the correct one. It is not that Gandhi supported the Khilafat cause. It is that he supported it **without asking for anything, and without building any structure that would outlast it**. He did not use the moment of maximum Muslim goodwill to settle the constitutional question of minority representation. He did not get separate electorates given up. He did not get a written understanding about what a free India would look like for Muslims. He assumed that shared struggle would produce shared trust and that the details could be settled later.

They could not be settled later. In 1927 and 1928 and 1929 the two sides tried, and failed, and Chapter 6 will show you that failure. By then the goodwill was gone and only the arithmetic was left.

VERDICT ON "KHILAFAT WAS GANDHI'S ORIGINAL BLUNDER"

HALF TRUE, AND THE USUAL VERSION BLAMES THE WRONG THING

FALSE that it was obviously foolish at the time, or that supporting a Muslim grievance was itself the error. It produced the most united mass movement in Indian history and it was opposed then, mainly, by people who wanted no mass movement at all.

TRUE that it made religion the fuel of mass politics, that it built a religious mobilising network that outlived its cause, that a Hindu counter mobilisation followed directly, and that the cause itself was destroyed in 1924 by the Turks.

The strongest version of the charge, which I accept: the failure was not the alliance. It was that Gandhi spent the entire capital of Hindu and Muslim unity on a foreign religious question and got no constitutional settlement in return. He was offered a moment and he used it for a gesture instead of a structure. Whether any structure was achievable is a fair question, and I will return to it in Parts 8 and 12.

STILL DEBATED: whether Muslim mass politics would have gone the same way anyway, given 1909 and the arithmetic of Part 1. Serious historians disagree, and I do not think the evidence settles it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Malabar, August 1921: The Hardest Chapter in This Book

I have rewritten this chapter more times than any other. It involves mass killing, forced conversion, a peasant revolt against real oppression, a British reconquest of enormous brutality, and a response by Gandhi that I think was wrong. All of those things are true at once, and most accounts you will read pick one and delete the rest.

The background nobody disputes

The Mappilas, called Moplahs in British records, are a Muslim community of the Malabar coast in what is now Kerala, descended largely from Arab traders and local converts. In the districts of Ernad and Valluvanad they were mostly landless or tenant cultivators.

The landlords, called janmis, were overwhelmingly Hindu, mainly Nambudiri Brahmins and Nairs. British land law from the early nineteenth century had converted what had been customary shared rights into absolute landlord ownership with the tenant reduced to a rent payer who could be evicted at will. Rents were extortionate and eviction was constant.

The result was a century of violence. Between the 1830s and 1920 there were dozens of Mappila outbreaks, and their pattern was consistent: attacks on landlords and their agents, temple desecration, and then death at the hands of British troops. This was not new in 1921. It had happened again and again for ninety years.

What happened in 1921

The Khilafat and Non Cooperation movements reached Malabar in 1920 and 1921 and were received with intense enthusiasm. Congress and Khilafat committees were formed. Tenant grievances and religious feeling fused.

On 20 August 1921 the police went to the Mambaram mosque at Tirurangadi to arrest Khilafat leaders. Rumours spread that the mosque had been damaged. Crowds attacked police and government offices. Within days British authority collapsed across a large area of Ernad and Valluvanad. Rebels declared their own administration under Variankunnath Kunjahammad Haji, cut the railway and telegraph, and burned records.

Then it changed. Once the British had gone, the violence turned on the local Hindu population. What followed included killings, forced conversions to Islam, destruction and desecration of temples, looting and the flight of tens of thousands of Hindus from their homes.

The British reconquest, which took until early 1922, was itself savage. In the incident known as the Wagon Tragedy, on 20 November 1921, sixty seven Mappila prisoners suffocated to death in a sealed goods wagon while being transported to prison.

The numbers, honestly

This is where you must be careful, because the figures are contested and both sides inflate.

FIGURE	SOURCE AND STATUS
2,337 rebels killed, 1,652 wounded, 45,404 imprisoned	Official British figures. These are firm and rarely disputed.
Around 10,000 total deaths	A commonly cited overall estimate including the reconquest, disease and famine conditions. It is an estimate, not a count.
At least 2,500 Hindus killed	Based on contemporary accounts from Hindu organisations and eyewitness reports. Widely repeated, but not from a systematic official count. Higher figures circulate and I could not verify them.
Forced conversions	Definitely occurred and on a substantial scale. The Arya Samaj later conducted shuddhi ceremonies reconverting a reported figure of over two thousand people, which gives a floor rather than a total. The Congress Working Committee resolution of the time mentioned only a handful of cases, which was indefensible.
67 dead in the Wagon Tragedy	Firm. British record.

Be suspicious of anyone who gives you a precise round number for Hindus killed. The honest statement is that thousands died in total, that a large number of the dead were Hindus killed by rebels, that a larger number were Mappilas killed by British forces, and that forced conversions happened on a scale nobody at the time recorded properly.

Was it a peasant revolt or a communal massacre?

Both, in sequence, and the sequence is the whole point.

It began as a rising against British authority and landlord power, with Khilafat feeling as its emotional charge. Within days of the British losing control, it became something else: violence directed at Hindus as Hindus, including Hindus who were not landlords. That transformation is exactly what happens when a class grievance is mobilised through religious identity and then the restraining authority is removed.

People who call it purely a freedom struggle have to explain the forced conversions and the temples. People who call it purely a religious massacre have to explain the ninety years of agrarian violence that preceded any Khilafat committee, and the two thousand Mappilas shot by the British.

Gandhi's response, which is the real charge

Gandhi was not in Malabar. What is at issue is what he wrote and said about it, mostly in his weekly paper *Young India*.

What he said, in order:

- He criticised the rebels for failing to remain nonviolent, but described them as among the bravest in the land.
- He is very widely quoted as having called them "brave God fearing Moplahs who were fighting for what they consider as religion and in a manner which they consider as religious". This sentence is quoted by Dr B. R. Ambedkar in *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, which is an independent and hostile source and makes it about as well attested as anything in this debate.
- On 20 October 1921 he wrote that Muslims must feel the shame and humiliation of the Moplah conduct regarding forcible conversions and looting, and must work to make such things impossible even among the most fanatical.
- He wrote that Hindus must find out the causes of Moplah fanaticism, and that they were not without blame, having treated the Mappila as a serf or dreaded him rather than as a neighbour.
- On 8 December 1921 he published an article titled *The Moplah Tragedy* in *Young India*. It appears in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, volume 21, as item 231.
- He appealed for funds for starving Mappila families in an article titled *The Starving Moplah*, writing that in the face of starvation and homelessness all argument and opposition must be hushed.

A QUOTE I COULD NOT VERIFY, AND WHY I AM PRINTING IT ANYWAY

A sentence circulates very widely in which Gandhi is said to have written that the Moplahs "were right in presenting the Koran or sword to the Hindus", and that Hindus who converted to save their lives had undergone "a voluntary change of faith and not forcible conversion".

I could not trace this to a verifiable citation in the *Collected Works*. It appears almost exclusively on sites arguing one position, generally with no volume, page or date attached. That does not prove it is fabricated. It does mean that by the rules set out in Part 1, it fails Rule 1, and I will not use it as evidence.

I am telling you this rather than silently leaving it out, because if you go looking into this subject you *will* meet this quote, and you should know its status. If a reader can send me a volume and page number from the *Collected Works*, I will correct this note in a later edition.

Testing the charge against him

Did he condemn the violence? Yes, but with a consistent pattern: the condemnation was usually paired with an explanation of the rebels' motives, praise for their courage or sincerity, and a demand that Hindus examine their own conduct as landlords. If you were a Hindu refugee from Ernad in October 1921, reading that you were "not without blame" would have felt like a wound.

Was there a double standard? This is Ambedkar's charge and it is the sharpest one. Ambedkar wrote that Gandhi was so obsessed with establishing Hindu and Muslim unity that he was prepared to minimise the conduct of the Moplahs and of the Khilafat leaders who congratulated them, and that Gandhi never called Muslims to account even for gross crimes against Hindus.

Ambedkar was neither a Hindu nationalist nor a Gandhi enemy for its own sake. He was a rigorous man making a specific accusation with examples.

What about the Congress resolution? The Congress Working Committee's resolution expressed regret at instances of "so called forcible conversion" by some fanatics, and warned the public against believing government versions. Given what had actually happened, the phrase "so called" is not defensible, and the warning against government propaganda functioned as a way of not looking.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI EXCUSED THE MOPLAH VIOLENCE"

SUBSTANTIALLY TRUE, WITH TWO CORRECTIONS

TRUE that Gandhi praised the rebels' courage and religious sincerity while they were killing and forcibly converting Hindus, that he told Hindus they were partly to blame, that he raised funds for Mappila families, and that the Congress resolution of the time minimised forcible conversions with the phrase "so called". The instinct to protect Hindu and Muslim unity plainly shaped what he was willing to say plainly.

Correction one: "Gandhi was silent" is **FALSE**. He wrote about it repeatedly and did state that Muslims should feel shame at the forcible conversions and looting. The accurate charge is not silence, it is imbalance.

Correction two: the most inflammatory quote used to prove this charge, about the Koran or the sword, could not be verified by me and should not be used until somebody produces the citation.

My own view, stated openly: this is one of the places where Gandhi's method failed on its own terms. His whole moral system rested on being harder on your own side than on the other. In Malabar he applied that rule to Hindus, correctly, and then failed to apply the corresponding rule to his Khilafat allies, whom he needed. That is not appeasement in the sense of cowardice. It is something more human and no less damaging: he could not bear to say the thing that would break the alliance he had built.

ANNIE BESANT, AT THE TIME

Annie Besant, a Theosophist and former Congress president, wrote an open letter titled "Malabar's Agony" in *New India* on 29 November 1921. She said it would be well if Gandhi could be taken into Malabar to see with his own eyes the horrors created by the preaching of himself and his "loved brothers" Mohammad and Shaukat Ali, and blamed the misery directly on the non cooperators and Khilafatists.

I include this because it destroys one common defence. It is sometimes said that criticism of Gandhi over Malabar is a modern invention by his political enemies. It is not. It was made loudly, in print, within three months, by a woman who had led the Congress four years earlier.

CHAPTER FIVE

Chauri Chaura: Did He Throw Away Freedom?

Of all the accusations against Gandhi, this is the one that carries the most emotion, and it is the one that collapses fastest under examination. That is an unusual combination, so let us go slowly.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"In February 1922 the Non Cooperation Movement had the British on the ropes. Freedom was within touching distance. Then a mob in one small town killed some policemen, and Gandhi called off the entire national movement over it. He handed the British another twenty five years. Even his own colleagues were furious. That single decision cost India a generation."

What happened at Chauri Chaura

On 4 February 1922, in the small town of Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur district of the United Provinces, a procession of volunteers was fired on by police. The crowd chased the police, who retreated into the police station. The crowd set the building on fire. Twenty two policemen were killed, most of them burned alive. Some accounts give twenty three.

Gandhi's reaction was immediate and absolute. He fasted for five days. On 12 February 1922 the Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli and passed the Bardoli Resolution, suspending the mass civil disobedience campaign and redirecting the movement into what he called the constructive programme: hand spinning, national schools, temperance work, Hindu and Muslim unity, and the removal of untouchability.

The fury inside the Congress was real

This part of the claim is completely true and should not be minimised. The decision was taken by Gandhi and imposed on a party that largely disagreed. Motilal Nehru, Chittaranjan Das, Lala Lajpat Rai and Subhas Chandra Bose all objected. Several were in jail and learned of it there. Jawaharlal Nehru later wrote of the shock and anger with which they received the news. Bose described it as a national calamity.

Gandhi's own answer was that a movement is not a machine for generating pressure, it is a moral claim, and a moral claim that produces men burning policemen alive has already failed. He also argued, more practically, that if the movement turned violent it would be crushed, because the British were incomparably better at violence than Indians were.

Now test the premise: was freedom actually within reach in February 1922?

This is the part the claim never examines. Apply Rule 6 from Part 1: for a "he could have" claim to stand, the opportunity has to have been real. So let us look at the state of British power in early 1922.

QUESTION	POSITION IN FEBRUARY 1922
Was the Indian Army wavering?	No. The army was loyal, had just been expanded and demobilised after the war, and had been used without hesitation against Indians in 1919 and 1921. There were no mutinies. Compare 1946, when there were, and see Part 7.
Was Britain financially broken?	No. Britain was strained by the war but was still a creditor of India, still running a payments surplus out of India, and had just expanded its empire in the Middle East. The financial collapse that mattered came after 1939.
Was the movement still growing?	It was fragmenting. The Khilafat wing was drifting towards confrontation, Malabar had frightened Hindu opinion badly, and the boycott of councils and schools was breaking down as students and lawyers drifted back.
Was there a plan for what came next?	No. Non cooperation had no stated mechanism for converting mass refusal into a transfer of power. Gandhi had promised swaraj in one year at Nagpur, which was a rhetorical promise, and it was about to come due unfulfilled.
Did the British think they were about to lose?	No. Viceroy Reading's correspondence of the period shows a government that was worried about disorder and about Gandhi's popularity, not a government preparing to leave.

There is a further point, and it is the strongest. The British had one enormous advantage over an unarmed mass movement: legitimacy for the use of force. As long as Indians were nonviolent, every use of force was a scandal that damaged the ruler. The moment Indians began killing policemen, force became policing, and the government's own people, its Indian soldiers and its Indian constables, would fight for it without hesitation. Gandhi's decision looks like moral fastidiousness. It was also, in cold strategic terms, a recognition that the movement's only weapon was about to be taken away from it.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI THREW AWAY FREEDOM AT CHAURI CHAURA"

FALSE IN ITS CENTRAL CLAIM

TRUE that he called off a mass movement over one incident, that he did it unilaterally, and that most of the senior leadership was angry. Nobody should pretend otherwise, and the anger of Bose, Das, Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru is on the record.

FALSE that freedom was within reach. There is no evidence for it. The army was loyal, the treasury was not broken, the movement had no plan for converting pressure into power, and the British records show no expectation of leaving. The claim assumes a collapse that was not happening.

STILL DEBATED, and reasonably: whether he needed to suspend the *entire* national campaign rather than that district's. A more limited response was available and he did not take it. That is a fair criticism, and it is a very different criticism from the one usually made.

Gandhi was arrested on 10 March 1922 and tried for sedition. At what became known as the Great Trial he pleaded guilty, invited the maximum penalty and made a statement that is one of the great documents of the period. The judge sentenced him to six years and said, in open court, that no one would be better pleased than himself if the government later saw fit to reduce it. He was released in February 1924 after an operation for appendicitis.

By then the movement he had built was in pieces, and something else was growing in the gap.

CHAPTER SIX

What Grew in the Ruins, 1922 to 1930

The 1920s are usually skipped. They have no famous march and no famous massacre. They are also the decade in which almost every organisation and every argument that produces 1947 comes into existence.

The alliance dies

The Khilafat cause was destroyed by the Turks themselves. The Sultanate went on 1 November 1922 and the Caliphate on 3 March 1924, abolished by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Indian Muslims who had sacrificed, gone to jail and in some cases lost everything discovered that the institution they had defended had been dismantled by the Muslims of the country concerned.

At the same time the Khilafat leaders felt betrayed by the sudden suspension at Bardoli. The alliance did not fade. It broke.

The worst communal decade so far

What followed was a wave of Hindu and Muslim rioting on a scale India had not seen. Multan in 1922. Nagpur in 1923 and 1924. Kohat in the North West Frontier in September 1924, where the Hindu and Sikh population was effectively driven out. Calcutta repeatedly. Dozens of towns through 1926 and 1927.

Gandhi's response to Kohat was a twenty one day fast in Delhi in September 1924, undertaken in the house of Maulana Mohammad Ali. It moved people and it changed nothing.

Alongside the riots came the numbers race that Part 1 predicted, now in organised form.

- **Shuddhi and Sangathan.** The Arya Samaj ran campaigns to convert or reconvert people to Hinduism and to organise Hindus for self defence. Swami Shraddhanand, the leading figure, was murdered by a Muslim assailant in December 1926.
- **Tabligh and Tanzim.** The Muslim counterparts, for religious propagation and community organisation.
- **Cow protection and music before mosques.** The two standard flashpoints of the decade, each a dispute about public space and each easily converted into a riot.

The organisations that are still with us

YEAR	DEVELOPMENT	WHY IT HAPPENED
1923	V. D. Savarkar writes <i>Essentials of Hindutva</i> while under restriction at Ratnagiri, defining a Hindu as one for whom India is both fatherland and holy land. That definition deliberately includes Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains and excludes Muslims and Christians.	An attempt to give Hindus a single political identity to match the mobilised identity that Khilafat had demonstrated.
1923 onwards	The Hindu Mahasabha, founded in 1915, is revived as an active political force under leaders including B. S. Moonje and Madan Mohan Malaviya.	A belief that Congress had sacrificed Hindu interests to keep the Khilafat alliance, and that Hindus needed their own political voice.
27 September 1925	The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is founded at Nagpur by Dr K. B. Hedgewar, with the involvement of B. S. Moonje, on Vijayadashami day.	Hedgewar had been a Congress worker in the Non Cooperation Movement and had gone to jail for it. He concluded from the Nagpur riots of 1923 and 1924 that Hindu society was disorganised, and that political parties could not fix that. His answer was a daily drill and character building organisation rather than a party.
1924 to 1927	Dr B. R. Ambedkar founds the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha in 1924, leads the Mahad satyagraha in March 1927 for the right of untouchables to drink from a public tank, and publicly burns the Manusmriti in December 1927.	A separate and much older grievance now enters national politics as an organised force with its own leader. This is the beginning of the confrontation that dominates Part 4.

A FACT THAT BOTH SIDES FIND INCONVENIENT

Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, was a Congress volunteer during Non Cooperation and was imprisoned for it. He did not build the RSS as a pro British body, and Part 6 will test that specific charge properly with evidence about the 1940s. He built it because he concluded that Gandhi's method had left Hindus mobilised for a Muslim cause and unable to defend themselves in a riot.

Whether that conclusion was right is a political argument. That it was a *reaction* to the events of this chapter, rather than an independent starting point, is a matter of record.

The constitutional road also fails

While all this was happening, Indians made one serious attempt to settle the communal question among themselves, and it failed in a way that mattered enormously.

- **1927, the Simon Commission.** Britain appointed a commission to review Indian government with seven members, every one of them British. The insult united Indians briefly. It was met everywhere with black flags and the slogan "Simon go back". It was during a lathi charge on one such demonstration at Lahore in October 1928 that Lala Lajpat Rai was injured. He died a few weeks later, and his death set Bhagat Singh on the path that Part 5 will follow.
- **1928, the Nehru Report.** Challenged to produce their own constitution, Indians did. A committee under Motilal Nehru proposed dominion status, a strong centre, joint electorates with reserved seats for Muslims where they were a minority, and no separate electorates.
- **1929, Jinnah's Fourteen Points.** Jinnah came to the All Parties Convention with amendments: one third of seats for Muslims at the centre, separate electorates retained until Muslims themselves gave them up, and residual powers to the provinces. The amendments were rejected.

Jinnah is said to have called the moment "the parting of the ways". Whether he used those exact words at that meeting is disputed, and I flag it as such. What is not disputed is that after 1929 he withdrew from the Indian political mainstream, spent much of the early 1930s practising law in London, and returned in 1935 a different politician.

The point for our story is this. Between 1927 and 1929, Indians tried to write their own constitutional settlement of the communal problem, without the British, and could not agree. Both sides had reasonable arguments. Congress said permanent religious quotas would prevent a nation from ever forming. The League said that without them a permanent minority had no protection. Both were right, which is precisely why it could not be solved.

And then the movement restarts

At the Lahore session in December 1929, under the presidency of the forty year old Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress adopted **Purna Swaraj**, complete independence, as its goal, and 26 January 1930 was declared Independence Day. That date is why India's Republic Day is 26 January.

On 12 March 1930 Gandhi set out from Sabarmati with seventy eight followers to walk 240 miles to the sea at Dandi and break the salt law. Part 4 begins there.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

Fifteen years have passed since Gandhi came home. The scoreboard is genuinely mixed, and I want to set it out plainly.

What he achieved

- He turned the Congress from a debating society of a few thousand into a mass organisation with village branches and a subscription a farmer could afford.
- He gave a disarmed people a method that used their only real asset, numbers, and that attacked the one thing the British could not do without, their own justification.
- He brought Muslim India into a national movement in numbers never seen before or since.
- He made the removal of untouchability a stated aim of the national movement, which no political body in India had done before, however inadequately he pursued it.

What went wrong

- He spent the whole capital of Hindu and Muslim unity on a foreign religious cause and obtained no constitutional settlement in return, and the cause then vanished.
- He made religion the fuel of mass politics, and a Hindu counter mobilisation followed within four years.
- Over Malabar he applied his own moral standard to one community and not to the other, and it damaged him with Hindu opinion permanently.
- He suspended the entire national movement unilaterally, which was strategically defensible and organisationally costly, and it left a legacy of resentment among the very leaders, Bose above all, who would later break with him.

And the structural problem underneath everything has not moved at all. In 1930 India still votes by religion, still counts by religion, and still cannot agree a constitution because neither side can safely concede what the other needs.

In Part 4 we go into the 1930s: the Round Table Conferences, the confrontation between Gandhi and Ambedkar that produced the Poona Pact, the elections of 1937 that humiliated the Muslim League and then made it, and the resolution passed in Lahore in 1940.

Timeline for Part 3

DATE	EVENT
1893	Gandhi arrives in South Africa. Thrown off the train at Pietermaritzburg.
1894	Founds the Natal Indian Congress.

DATE	EVENT
1904 to 1905	Writes the letters and petitions that carry the racially hierarchical language discussed in Chapter 1.
1906	Launches satyagraha in Johannesburg. Serves in a stretcher bearer corps during the Bambatha rebellion.
1913	Leads the miners' march across the Transvaal border.
January 1915	Returns to India.
1917	Champaran satyagraha, Bihar.
1918	Ahmedabad mill strike and Kheda revenue refusal.
March 1919	Rowlatt Act. Nationwide hartal.
13 April 1919	Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Amritsar. Official figure 379 dead.
1919 to 1920	Khilafat movement begins under the Ali brothers. Treaty of Sevres.
1920	The hijrat. About eighteen thousand Muslim peasants migrate towards Afghanistan and are turned back.
September 1920	Special Calcutta session of Congress adopts Non Cooperation, linked to Khilafat and Punjab.
December 1920	Nagpur session. Congress constitution rewritten. Jinnah resigns from the Congress.
20 August 1921	Malabar rebellion begins at Tirurangadi.
20 November 1921	The Wagon Tragedy. Sixty seven Mappila prisoners suffocate.
29 November 1921	Annie Besant's open letter "Malabar's Agony" in <i>New India</i> .
8 December 1921	Gandhi's article <i>The Moplah Tragedy</i> in <i>Young India</i> .
4 February 1922	Chauri Chaura. Twenty two policemen killed.
12 February 1922	Bardoli Resolution suspends the movement.
10 to 18 March 1922	Gandhi arrested and tried. Sentenced to six years.
1 November 1922	Turkey abolishes the Sultanate.
1923	Savarkar's <i>Essentials of Hindutva</i> . Nagpur riots.
February 1924	Gandhi released from prison.

DATE	EVENT
3 March 1924	Ataturk abolishes the Caliphate. The Khilafat cause ceases to exist.
September 1924	Kohat riots. Gandhi's twenty one day fast in Delhi.
1924	Ambedkar founds the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha.
27 September 1925	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh founded at Nagpur by K. B. Hedgewar.
December 1926	Swami Shraddhanand murdered.
March 1927	Mahad satyagraha led by Ambedkar.
December 1927	Ambedkar publicly burns the Manusmriti.
1927 to 1928	Simon Commission and the boycott. Lajpat Rai injured at Lahore, October 1928, and dies.
1928	Nehru Report proposes joint electorates.
1929	Jinnah's Fourteen Points rejected. He withdraws from mainstream politics.
December 1929	Lahore Congress adopts Purna Swaraj. 26 January declared Independence Day.
12 March 1930	The Salt March begins. Part 4 starts here.

Word list

Satyagraha	Literally holding to truth. Gandhi's method: openly break an unjust law, refuse to resist arrest, accept the punishment, and do it in large numbers.
Hartal	A complete shutdown of shops and work as a form of protest.
Non Cooperation	The 1920 to 1922 campaign of withdrawing from British courts, schools, councils, titles and goods.
Khilafat	The movement of Indian Muslims from 1919 to 1924 to protect the Ottoman Caliph's position after the First World War.
Caliph	The symbolic head of the worldwide Sunni Muslim community. The title was held by the Ottoman Sultan until 1924.
Hijrat	Migration for religious reasons. Used here for the 1920 movement of Muslim peasants towards Afghanistan.
Mappila or Moplah	A Muslim community of the Malabar coast in present day Kerala.
Janmi	A hereditary landlord in Malabar, in this period almost always Hindu.

Shuddhi	An Arya Samaj ceremony and campaign to bring people into or back into Hinduism.
Sangathan, Tabligh, Tanzim	Community organising movements of the 1920s. Sangathan among Hindus, Tabligh and Tanzim among Muslims.
Hindutva	Savarkar's 1923 definition of Hindu political identity, based on India being both fatherland and holy land.
Purna Swaraj	Complete independence, adopted as the Congress goal in December 1929.
Constructive programme	Gandhi's alternative to agitation: spinning, village industry, national schools, communal unity and work against untouchability.

Sources used in Part 3

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COMING NEXT

Part 4: The 1930s, Castes, Constitutions and Cracks. The Salt March and what it actually achieved. The Round Table Conferences and why they failed. The Communal Award and the confrontation between Gandhi and Ambedkar, with Ambedkar's argument given at full strength. The Government of India Act of 1935. The elections of 1937, in which the Muslim League was crushed, and the decision in the United Provinces that many historians call the mistake that made Pakistan. And the Lahore Resolution of 1940.

Part 3 of a twelve part series. Researched, written and compiled by Lovepreet Singh.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART FOUR OF TWELVE

Castes, Constitutions and Cracks

*The Salt March, the Poona Pact, the elections of 1937
and the resolution that changed everything*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The 1930s do not look dramatic from outside. There is one famous walk to the sea, and after that a decade of committees, conferences, elections and legal drafts. Most popular histories skip it in a paragraph.

I think that is exactly backwards. This is the decade where the thing was decided.

In these ten years two men fasted against each other over how a community should vote, an election proved that a party had almost no support and then that same party rebuilt itself into a mass movement, and a resolution was passed in Lahore whose deliberately vague wording is still argued about today. Nothing in 1947 is intelligible without this decade.

There is one chapter here I want to warn you about. The confrontation between Gandhi and Ambedkar in 1932 is the hardest argument in this whole book to be fair about, because both men were right about something important and both did something indefensible. I have given each of them their case at full strength, in their own words, before giving a verdict. If you finish that chapter feeling uncomfortable with both of them, I have done my job.

I have also, for the first time in this series, printed a set of quotations that many people would prefer stayed unprinted, from a book published in 1939. I have included the authorship dispute around it honestly, because that dispute is real and it matters.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART FOUR

RECAP	Where Parts 1 to 3 left us
CHAPTER 1	The Salt March and what it actually achieved
CHAPTER 2	The Round Table Conferences and why they failed
CHAPTER 3	Gandhi against Ambedkar: the fast and the Poona Pact
CHAPTER 4	1935 and 1937: the election that humiliated the Muslim League
CHAPTER 5	The United Provinces decision: the mistake that made Pakistan?
CHAPTER 6	Congress rule and the atrocities charge
CHAPTER 7	1939 and 1940: the ideologies harden
CLOSING	Timeline, word list, sources, what comes next

RECAP

Where Parts One to Three Left Us

One page, so you can start here if you need to.

British rule made religion the operating system of Indian public life: a legal category in court, a box on the census form, and from 1909 the basis of the vote itself through separate electorates. In 1916 the Congress accepted that system at Lucknow in exchange for a moment of unity.

Gandhi returned in 1915 and within five years turned the Congress from a debating society into a mass organisation with village branches and a four anna subscription. He gave a disarmed people a method that worked against the one thing the British could not do without, their own justification for being there.

He then spent the entire capital of Hindu and Muslim unity on the Khilafat cause and obtained no constitutional settlement in return. The cause was destroyed by the Turks themselves in 1924. Malabar burned in 1921 and his response to it was imbalanced in a way that damaged him permanently with Hindu opinion. He suspended the whole national movement after Chauri Chaura in 1922, which was strategically defensible and organisationally costly.

Out of the wreckage of the 1920s came the Hindu Mahasabha revived, Savarkar's Hindutva in 1923, the RSS in 1925, and Ambedkar's movement from 1924. Between 1927 and 1929 Indians tried to write their own constitutional settlement of the communal question, without the British, and could not agree.

Part 4 covers 1930 to 1940. It ends with a resolution passed in Lahore that does not contain the word Pakistan.

CHAPTER ONE

The Salt March and What It Actually Achieved

Everyone knows the picture. Almost nobody can tell you what changed because of it. The answer is more interesting than the myth.

Why salt

The Congress had adopted complete independence as its goal at Lahore in December 1929. Gandhi now had to choose a way to fight for it, and his choice baffled almost everybody at the time, including Nehru and the Working Committee.

The government held a monopoly on salt. It was illegal for an Indian to make or collect salt, and there was a tax on what you bought. Think about what that means. Salt is the one thing every human being must have, the poorest labourer and the richest merchant alike, and in a hot country where people sweat all day it is not optional. The tax was small in rupees and enormous in meaning.

That is exactly why Gandhi chose it. A land revenue campaign would mobilise peasants only. A tax on cloth would mobilise weavers. Salt touched literally everybody, it required no organisation to break the law, and the law itself was impossible to defend in front of an audience. You cannot explain to the world why picking up salt from a beach is a crime.

What happened

On 12 March 1930 Gandhi left Sabarmati Ashram with seventy eight chosen followers and walked about 240 miles to the coastal village of Dandi, arriving on 5 April. On the morning of 6 April he picked up a lump of natural salt from the mud and said, in effect, that he was shaking the foundations of the empire.

Then the country did it too. Salt was made illegally on every coast. Where there was no coast, people boycotted foreign cloth and liquor shops and refused taxes. Somewhere between sixty thousand and ninety thousand people were arrested, including Gandhi himself in May.

The turning point for world opinion came at the Dharasana salt works on 21 May 1930. Column after column of volunteers walked forward to be beaten down by police with steel tipped lathis, without raising an arm. The American journalist Webb Miller counted the wounded and cabled a report that was printed in over a thousand newspapers worldwide. It is one of the most consequential pieces of reporting in the history of the freedom movement, because it made the moral position of British rule indefensible in the one place the British cared about, which was the opinion of other Western countries.

What it got, and what it did not

On 5 March 1931 Gandhi and the Viceroy Lord Irwin signed the Gandhi Irwin Pact. Congress would suspend civil disobedience. The government would release political prisoners not

convicted of violence, return confiscated property, and allow people living near the coast to make salt for their own use. Congress would attend the Round Table Conference in London.

Look at that list honestly. There is no independence in it. There is no dominion status. There is not even an inquiry into police conduct, which Gandhi asked for and did not get. In pure bargaining terms he got very little.

Younger Congressmen were furious, and Subhas Chandra Bose was the loudest. Two weeks after the pact was signed, on 23 March 1931, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were hanged at Lahore, and the accusation that Gandhi could have saved them and did not begins from exactly this moment. That charge is the subject of Part 5 and I will not deal with it here.

VERDICT ON "THE SALT MARCH ACHIEVED NOTHING"

FALSE, BUT IT ACHIEVED SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM WHAT PEOPLE THINK

TRUE that it produced almost no constitutional gain. The Gandhi Irwin Pact was a thin document and Gandhi's critics inside the Congress said so at the time.

FALSE that it was therefore pointless. It did three things that mattered more than clauses. It made a Viceroy sit down and negotiate as an equal with a man he had jailed, which had never happened. It brought women into the national movement in large numbers for the first time, through the picketing campaigns. And through Dharasana it destroyed the moral standing of British rule in front of an international audience whose opinion Britain needed.

The lesson to carry forward: mass movements in this period almost never won concrete concessions. What they did was change what was thinkable. Keep that distinction in mind when we reach Part 7 and weigh Gandhi's contribution against the Second World War.

CHAPTER TWO

The Round Table Conferences and Why They Failed

Three conferences in London, from 1930 to 1932, meant to design India's constitutional future. They failed, and the reason they failed is the reason this whole book exists.

CONFERENCE	WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
First	November 1930 to January 1931	Congress boycotted it entirely because its leaders were in jail. Princes, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, Sikhs, Ambedkar and others attended. Without the largest party present it could decide nothing.
Second	September to December 1931	Gandhi attended as the sole representative of the Congress, having claimed that the Congress represented all of India. It collapsed over the communal question.
Third	November to December 1932	Congress absent again. Small attendance. It produced the framework that became the Government of India Act of 1935.

The claim that broke the second conference

Gandhi went to London arguing that the Congress alone spoke for the whole Indian nation, including Muslims, including the Depressed Classes, including everybody. It was a sincere claim and it was politically necessary for him, because if India was many communities negotiating separately then India was not a nation and the British could stay indefinitely as referee.

The trouble was that other people in the room did not accept it.

The Muslim delegates did not accept that Gandhi spoke for Muslims. The Sikhs did not accept that he spoke for Sikhs. And Dr B. R. Ambedkar, who was there as the representative of the Depressed Classes, told the conference to its face that Gandhi did not speak for the untouchables and that the Congress had done nothing for them.

That confrontation in a London committee room is the beginning of the most painful argument in this part.

Why the British position was cynical and also unanswerable

The British line at these conferences was simple: settle the communal question among yourselves and we will discuss transferring power. If you cannot agree, we will have to decide for you.

It was cynical because they had built the system that made agreement almost impossible, as Part 2 showed, and because every failure to agree extended their stay. Ramsay MacDonald knew perfectly well that an award imposed from London would harden the divisions further.

And it was unanswerable, because the Indians in that room genuinely could not agree. Not because they were unreasonable, but because the two positions were incompatible in the way I set

out in Part 3. Congress said permanent religious quotas would prevent a nation from ever forming. The minorities said that without guarantees they had no protection against a permanent majority. Both were correct.

So on 16 August 1932 Ramsay MacDonald announced the Communal Award, and everything changed.

CHAPTER THREE

Gandhi Against Ambedkar: The Fast and the Poona Pact

This is the chapter I have rewritten most. Two great men, both right about something, both doing something they should not have done. I am going to give each of them the strongest possible case before I say anything of my own.

What the Communal Award actually did

The Award granted separate electorates to Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo Indians and Europeans, which continued what had existed since 1909.

And it extended separate electorates to the **Depressed Classes**, the communities we now call Scheduled Castes or Dalits. They were given about 71 reserved seats in the provincial legislatures, to be filled by voters from those communities voting separately. They were also given a double vote: they could vote in their own separate constituency and in the general constituency as well.

Gandhi's response

Gandhi was in Yerawada jail in Poona. On 20 September 1932 he began a fast unto death against this one clause. Not against separate electorates for Muslims, which he had accepted since 1916. Against separate electorates for the Depressed Classes.

Within days he was weakening dangerously. The country was in a state of panic. Temples were suddenly thrown open to untouchables across India, wells were opened, and mass meetings passed resolutions. Ambedkar came to the jail to negotiate with a dying man while every newspaper in India told its readers who would be responsible if that man died.

Ambedkar's case, at full strength

1. **Only untouchables can represent untouchables.** Under a joint electorate, a Dalit candidate in a reserved seat still needs the votes of caste Hindus, who are the overwhelming majority of the constituency. So the winner will always be the Dalit who is most acceptable to caste Hindus, not the one his own community would choose. Ambedkar's phrase for such men was that they would be nominees, not representatives.
2. **The Depressed Classes are a separate element, not a subdivision of Hindus.** They suffer a disability no other group suffers, imposed by the very community they are supposedly part of. If Muslims get protection from a Hindu majority, why should untouchables not get protection from the caste Hindus who exclude them from wells and temples?
3. **The fast was moral coercion, not a moral argument.** Ambedkar said openly that this was a political move dressed as a spiritual one. He was being asked to choose between his community's political rights and the life of the most revered man in India, with the whole country watching. That is not a negotiation. Later, in *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* in 1945, he wrote that the Pact was signed under duress.

4. **Gandhi's own record did not earn him the trust.** Gandhi in the 1920s had defended varnashrama, the fourfold order, while condemning untouchability. To Ambedkar that was incoherent: untouchability is not a defect in the caste system, it is a product of it, and you cannot remove the fruit while protecting the root.
5. **The word Harijan.** Gandhi called untouchables Harijans, children of God. Ambedkar found it patronising, a name given by the oppressor to the oppressed, and pointed out that his people had not asked for a new name, they had asked for power.

Gandhi's case, at full strength

1. **Separate electorates would make the split permanent.** His central claim was structural, and Part 2 of this book supports him on the mechanism. He had watched what separate electorates did to Hindu and Muslim politics after 1909. He believed that giving the Depressed Classes their own electorate would freeze them outside Hindu society forever, and that the price of that permanence would be paid by the weaker party.
2. **The reform had to happen inside Hindu society.** Untouchability was a sin committed by caste Hindus. A political mechanism that let caste Hindus stop thinking about it, by handing the problem to a separate electorate, would remove the pressure to change. He wanted caste Hindus to be forced to court Dalit votes.
3. **He was not opposing representation, only the mechanism.** He offered, and delivered, more than double the reserved seats. That is a real concession and it was not a trick.
4. **His fast was directed at Hindus, not at Ambedkar.** His stated target was caste Hindu society, whom he was trying to shock into reform. The evidence that this worked at least partly is that temple entry and well access happened at speed during those six days on a scale no legislation had achieved.

The Poona Pact, 24 September 1932

Ambedkar signed. The terms:

- Separate electorates for the Depressed Classes were dropped.
- Reserved seats in the provincial legislatures rose from about **71 to 148**, filled through joint electorates.
- Reserved seats in the central legislature were fixed at eighteen percent of the general seats.
- A primary election system: Depressed Class voters would choose a panel of four candidates for each reserved seat, and the general electorate would then choose from that panel. This provision was allowed to lapse and never operated in practice.

Gandhi broke his fast. The country celebrated. Ambedkar went home having got more seats and less independence, and he never forgave the method.

VERDICT ON THE POONA PACT

BOTH MEN WERE RIGHT, AND ONE OF THEM CHEATED

Gandhi was right about the mechanism. Separate electorates do harden a group permanently outside the body politic. We watched that happen to Hindu and Muslim politics from 1909 onwards. Anyone who says Gandhi's objection was insincere has to explain why the identical objection was correct in the Muslim case.

Ambedkar was right about the representation. Ninety years of experience since have proved his prediction. Reserved seats in joint electorates have overwhelmingly produced representatives dependent on the majority party rather than on their own community. He said in 1932 exactly what would happen, and it happened.

And the method was indefensible. Whatever Gandhi's intention, the practical effect was that one man's life was placed on the scale against another community's political rights, in public, with the whole country watching. It is not a coincidence that Gandhi never used a fast unto death this way against the Muslim League, which had far more to concede. He used the weapon where it would work, on the weaker party. Ambedkar's word for it was duress, and I do not think that word can be argued away.

The wider claim: "Gandhi and Congress did nothing for the untouchables"

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Ambedkar himself said the Congress and Gandhi did nothing for the untouchables. Gandhi defended the caste system, gave Dalits a patronising name, and blocked their political rights. All the real gains came from Ambedkar."

What is true. Ambedkar did say it, and he wrote a whole book with that title in 1945. Gandhi did defend varnashrama in his earlier years. The Poona Pact did remove a political weapon from Dalit hands. The primary election safeguard was quietly dropped. And the great constitutional gains, the abolition of untouchability in Article 17, the reservation framework, the framing of the Constitution itself, came through Ambedkar.

What is left out. Gandhi made the removal of untouchability a formal aim of the national movement in 1920, when no other political body in India had done so. He founded the Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1932 and the weekly *Harijan* in 1933, and he toured the country for nine months in 1933 and 1934 on an anti untouchability campaign, during which he was attacked by orthodox Hindus and a bomb was thrown at his car in Poona. He also changed. By the 1940s he was refusing to attend any wedding that was not between a caste Hindu and a so called untouchable, and he had abandoned his earlier defence of the fourfold order.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI DID NOTHING FOR DALITS"

HALF TRUE

FALSE that he did nothing. He put the issue on the national agenda, campaigned on it personally at physical risk, and moved a great deal in his own views over twenty five years.

TRUE that what he offered was reform from above by the guilty, not power to the wronged, and that when the two collided in 1932 he used his life as a lever to take political power off the table. Ambedkar wanted rights, not repentance. That is the whole difference between them, and it is a real one.

CHAPTER FOUR

1935 and 1937: The Election That Humiliated the Muslim League

If you remember only one set of numbers from this entire book, make it the ones in this chapter. They demolish the most common story told about Partition.

The Government of India Act, 1935

It was the longest Act the British Parliament had ever passed. Its main features:

- **Provincial autonomy.** The eleven provinces would be governed by ministries responsible to elected legislatures. This was real power over education, health, police, land revenue and local government.
- **Governors kept emergency powers** to override those ministries, which is why nationalists called it a fraud.
- **A federation at the centre** including the princely states, which required the princes to join voluntarily. They did not. This part of the Act never came into being.
- **An expanded franchise** of around thirty million people, roughly one adult in six, based on property and education qualifications. Still not democracy, but ten times the previous electorate.
- **Separate electorates continued** and were extended, following the Communal Award and the Poona Pact.

Nobody liked it. Nehru called it a charter of slavery. Jinnah called it thoroughly rotten and fundamentally bad. Both then fought the elections under it, because it was the only power on offer.

The results of the 1937 elections

Here are the numbers. Read them slowly.

RESULT	FIGURE
Total provincial assembly seats	1,585
Seats won by the Indian National Congress	711, with outright majorities in five provinces and the ability to form governments in most
Seats reserved for Muslims across British India	482
Seats won by the All India Muslim League	109, that is under 23 percent of the seats reserved for its own community

RESULT	FIGURE
Total votes cast by Muslim voters for Muslim candidates	7,319,445
Votes that went to the Muslim League	321,772, about 4.4 percent
Provinces where the Muslim League formed a government	None

WHAT THESE NUMBERS MEAN, IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

In 1937, out of every 100 votes cast by Indian Muslims, the Muslim League got about four.

The party that would demand Pakistan three years later, and get it ten years later, was at this point rejected by roughly ninety five percent of the Muslim voters who bothered to vote. It did not run a single province. It was not, in any meaningful sense, the voice of Indian Muslims.

Who did Muslims actually vote for?

This is the part that gets erased from both the Indian and Pakistani versions of the story. In the Muslim majority provinces, Muslims voted for *regional* parties that were built on land, class and locality rather than on religion.

PROVINCE	WHO WON	WHAT KIND OF PARTY
Punjab	The Unionist Party under Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan	A cross community party of landholders: Muslim, Hindu Jat and Sikh landlords together. It kept Punjab out of communal politics for a decade.
Bengal	The Krishak Praja Party under A. K. Fazlul Huq	A peasants and tenants party campaigning on debt relief and land reform, not on religion.
North West Frontier Province	Congress, in alliance with Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Khudai Khidmatgars	An overwhelmingly Muslim province that voted for the Congress.
Sindh	Shifting coalitions of local parties	Local and personal, not League.

Hold this table in your mind. In 1937 the four provinces that would form the core of West Pakistan and East Pakistan were governed by parties that were not the Muslim League and in one case by the Congress itself.

VERDICT ON "MUSLIMS ALWAYS WANTED PAKISTAN"

FALSE

The documentary record of the only reasonably wide election held before the demand was made shows the party of Pakistan winning about 4.4 percent of Muslim votes and no provinces at all. The Muslim majority provinces voted for landlord and peasant parties and, in the Frontier, for the Congress.

Which raises the question that the next four parts of this book exist to answer: **how did a party with four percent in 1937 sweep the Muslim seats in 1946?** Something happened in those nine years. It was not ancient religious destiny. It was a sequence of decisions by identifiable people, and we are about to watch the first of them.

CHAPTER FIVE

The United Provinces Decision: The Mistake That Made Pakistan?

Many serious historians point to a single decision in the summer of 1937, in one province, as the moment the Muslim League was given its second life. Let us test that.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"After the 1937 elections the Muslim League in the United Provinces wanted to join a coalition government with the Congress. Nehru refused, and demanded that the League party dissolve itself. That arrogance humiliated moderate Muslim leaders who wanted to work with Congress, proved to Muslims that the Congress would never share power, and handed Jinnah the argument he needed. Nehru made Pakistan."

What actually happened

In the United Provinces, the Congress won a clear majority. The Muslim League won twenty seven of the sixty six Muslim seats, its best performance anywhere, and during the campaign the two parties had cooperated in places rather than fighting each other.

The two leading League figures in the province were Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman and Nawab Mohammad Ismail Khan. Both expected, and were widely expected, to be taken into the ministry.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who was the Congress leader most involved, wanted exactly that. In his memoir *India Wins Freedom*, Azad states plainly that he had hoped both men would be made ministers and that his efforts were frustrated by Nehru, who was Congress president at the time.

What Nehru offered instead was that only **one** of the two could enter the ministry, and, crucially, that the Muslim League parliamentary party in the United Provinces should dissolve itself and its members join the Congress group. Neither man was willing to come in alone on those terms. They declined. There was no coalition.

Azad's judgement on this, from inside the Congress leadership, is blunt: Nehru's action gave the Muslim League in the United Provinces a new lease of life.

Nehru's defence, which is not stupid

It would be easy to present this as arrogance and stop. It was more than that, and the reasoning deserves to be stated properly.

- **Congress did not need a coalition.** It had a majority. In a parliamentary system, a party with a majority forms a government. That is not a communal insult, it is arithmetic.
- **Nehru's objection was ideological.** He genuinely believed Indian politics should divide on economic lines, between those who wanted land reform and those who did not, and that religious blocs were a colonial artefact that had to be dissolved rather than accommodated. He

famously said there were only two parties in India, the Congress and the British. Bringing a communal party into government as a communal party would, in his view, permanently entrench the very thing that had to be destroyed.

- **Congress was running the Muslim Mass Contact campaign** at exactly this time, trying to recruit Muslims directly as Congressmen. Making a deal with the League at the top would have undercut that entirely.

Testing the claim

Points in favour of the claim. The two men refused were precisely the kind of Muslim leaders who wanted to work inside a united India. Humiliating them proved Jinnah's central argument: that Congress would not share power with Muslims even when it cost nothing to do so. Within two years the League had turned itself into a mass party in exactly this province, and Khaliqzaman became one of Jinnah's most important lieutenants. Azad, a Congress Muslim with every reason to defend his own party, blamed Nehru in print.

Points against the claim. A party with a majority is not obliged to share power, and no British or European party would have. The League was tiny nationally in 1937, and it is a stretch to say that a provincial ministry post for two men would have changed the trajectory of a subcontinent. The Punjab and Bengal, which decided Partition, were not affected by the United Provinces decision at all. And the structural problem, which is the whole argument of Parts 1 and 2, was there regardless of who got a ministry.

VERDICT ON "THE UP DECISION MADE PAKISTAN"

HALF TRUE, AND USUALLY OVERSTATED

TRUE that a coalition was expected, that Azad wanted it, that Nehru blocked it on terms amounting to surrender, and that a senior Congress leader blamed him for reviving the League. This is not Muslim League propaganda. It is Azad, in his own memoir.

FALSE that it single handedly caused Partition. Punjab and Bengal, the provinces that actually mattered, were governed by parties hostile to the League and were not touched by this decision.

The accurate statement: it was a serious unforced error at exactly the wrong moment. It did not create the demand for Pakistan. It gave a dying party a grievance, an argument and a mission, and there is a real difference between causing a fire and handing somebody a match.

CHAPTER SIX

Congress Rule and the Atrocities Charge

Congress governed eight provinces from July 1937 to late 1939. What it did in those twenty eight months became the Muslim League's central campaigning argument for the next decade.

What the Congress ministries actually did

The record is not a bad one, and it should be stated before the charges. They released thousands of political prisoners. They restored civil liberties and lifted bans on books and organisations. They passed tenancy legislation improving the position of cultivators against landlords, which is the reason landlord interests turned against them so sharply. They expanded primary education and prohibition. Ministers took modest salaries and travelled third class.

The charges

The Muslim League appointed a committee under Raja Syed Mohammad Mehdi of Pirpur to investigate the treatment of Muslims under Congress rule. The Pirpur Report, ninety six pages, was presented on 15 November 1938. A second report by A. K. Sharif in March 1939 covered Bihar, and a third covered the Central Provinces.

The main allegations were these:

- **Vande Mataram.** Sung at the opening of assembly sessions and in schools. Muslims objected that it came from a novel in which Hindus fight Muslim rulers and that it involves the worship of the land as a goddess, which is idolatry in Islam. Congress eventually agreed to use only the first two stanzas, which was too late to undo the damage.
- **The tricolour flag** flown over public buildings, presented as a party flag imposed as a national one.
- **The Wardha scheme of basic education** and the Vidya Mandir scheme in the Central Provinces, alleged to promote Hindu religious content and to undermine Muslim schooling.
- **Language.** Promotion of Hindi in the Devanagari script at the expense of Urdu, in provinces where Urdu had been the language of administration and courts.
- **Riots and administrative bias.** Allegations that Muslims got no justice from Congress police and magistrates, and that Muslims were excluded from services and from Congress ministries.

How serious were these charges?

Historians who have examined the reports generally conclude that the specific allegations were exaggerated, that many incidents were reported without evidence or were ordinary local disputes recast in communal terms, and that no independent inquiry substantiated a pattern of atrocity. The Congress asked for an impartial inquiry by a British judge and the League refused it, which tells you something about the confidence of the case.

But dismissing the whole thing as propaganda is a mistake, and here is why. Strip out the invented incidents and a real grievance remains underneath, and it is a grievance about **symbols and exclusion rather than atrocity**.

The Congress genuinely did believe it was a national party rather than a Hindu one. But its national symbols, its song, its language preference and its cultural instincts were drawn from the majority community, because that is what its leaders were. To a Muslim shopkeeper in Lucknow, the government of his province now opened its business with a Hindu devotional song, flew a party flag as a national one, promoted Hindi over the Urdu his son needed for a clerkship, and contained no minister from his community's largest party. None of that is an atrocity. All of it says: this country belongs to somebody else and you live in it.

VERDICT ON THE "CONGRESS ATROCITIES" CHARGE

LARGELY FALSE IN ITS DETAILS, DANGEROUSLY TRUE IN ITS THEME

FALSE that Congress ministries carried out systematic oppression of Muslims. The specific allegations in the Pirpur and Sharif reports were mostly unverified, and the League refused an impartial judicial inquiry into its own charges.

TRUE that Congress governed with majority symbols, gave the minority's largest party no share of office anywhere, and was tone deaf about what that looked like from below.

Why it mattered more than the truth of it: in politics, a widely believed grievance is a fact whether or not the underlying allegation is. The Pirpur Report gave the Muslim League something it had never had: a story about the future. Not "we deserve more seats", which is a lawyer's argument, but "look what they did to us with only provincial power, now imagine them with a country". That story is what took the League from 4.4 percent to a mass movement, and it was handed to Jinnah by Congress conduct in office.

The Congress ministries resigned in October and November 1939 over the Viceroy declaring India at war without consulting anybody. Jinnah called on Muslims to observe 22 December 1939 as a **Day of Deliverance** from Congress rule. That is the temperature of Indian politics on the eve of the war, and Part 6 begins there.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1939 and 1940: The Ideologies Harden

Two documents from these two years matter more than anything else written in the decade. One is a book. One is a resolution.

Golwalkar, 1939

M. S. Golwalkar became head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1940. In 1939 a book appeared under his name, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. Its argument is that a nation requires five unities, geographical, racial, religious, cultural and linguistic, and that in India this describes the Hindus. Non Hindu groups, in its formulation, must either merge entirely into the Hindu nation, adopting its culture and language and holding no separate claims, or remain in the country wholly subordinated, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges and not even citizen's rights.

The passage that is most often quoted, and that I am printing because leaving it out would be dishonest, praises Germany for what it calls purging the country of the Semitic races, the Jews, and calls this a good lesson for India to learn and profit by.

Two points of fairness must be made here, and I will make both.

- **The authorship is genuinely disputed.** It has been argued for decades, including by people inside the organisation, that the book was substantially a translation of a Marathi work by Ganesh Damodar Savarkar, the elder brother of V. D. Savarkar, rather than Golwalkar's own composition. Historians disagree about how much of it is his. The book was published under his name and made his reputation within the organisation, so he cannot be entirely separated from it, but the dispute is real and I am not going to pretend it is not.
- **The RSS itself later withdrew it.** The organisation stopped circulating the book and has publicly distanced itself from its contents, saying it does not represent its position.

What matters for this book is not a verdict on an organisation that still exists. It is this: by 1939, the two nation idea was being stated in its hardest form on *both* sides, and each side could point to the other's text as proof that it was right. Jinnah did exactly that in his negotiations, and Part 8 will show you where.

Jinnah, 1935 to 1940

The Jinnah who returns from London in 1935 is not the Jinnah of Part 2. He is sixty, his wife is dead, his health is poor, and he has watched the constitutional path fail three times: the Nehru Report in 1928, the Fourteen Points in 1929, and the coalition talks of 1937.

Muhammad Iqbal wrote him a series of letters in 1936 and 1937 urging him to take up the cause of a separate Muslim political future, and telling him that the Muslim League would be nothing until it became the party of the Muslim masses rather than the Muslim gentry. Jinnah took the

advice. Between 1937 and 1940 he rebuilt the League as a mass organisation, using the Pirpur grievances as fuel and the Congress ministries as the enemy.

The Lahore Resolution, 23 March 1940

At the Muslim League session at Lahore, a resolution drafted with Muhammad Zafarullah Khan's involvement was moved by **A. K. Fazlul Huq**, the Bengali peasant leader who had won Bengal in 1937 on a land reform platform and not on religion. Its key words:

"...that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute Independent States, in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign."

Lahore Resolution of the All India Muslim League, 23 March 1940

Now notice three things, because all three become critical in Part 8.

1. **The word Pakistan does not appear.** Not once. The name was applied to it afterwards, and by press accounts it was Hindu newspapers that popularised calling it the Pakistan Resolution, as a way of attacking it.
2. **It says "States", plural.** Two zones, north west and east, grouped into independent states. Whether that meant one country in two wings, two separate countries, or autonomous units inside a loose Indian federation is not stated. The ambiguity was not an accident, and Jinnah maintained it for years.
3. **It does not say what happens to Muslims in the rest of India**, who were about a third of India's Muslims and who could not move into either zone. That question is never answered by anybody, and it is the question Part 10 of this book is built around.

THE QUESTION TO HOLD ON TO

Was the Lahore Resolution a demand or a bargaining position? Jinnah was a constitutional lawyer who had spent thirty years negotiating. A vague resolution demanding the maximum is what a lawyer tables when he expects to settle for less. Several serious historians, including Ayesha Jalal, have argued that Pakistan was a bargaining counter to secure a strong federal share for Muslims and that Jinnah was surprised to be taken at his word.

Other historians reject this and say he meant it from 1940. The evidence for both readings sits in the events of 1946, and I will lay it out properly in Part 8 rather than pretending it is settled here.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

The decade began with a man walking to the sea and ended with a resolution nobody could pin down. In between, four things changed permanently.

- **The Depressed Classes entered national politics as an independent force**, and were then pushed back into the Hindu fold by a fast. Ambedkar's grievance from 1932 shapes everything he does afterwards, including how he responds to the Pakistan demand in Part 9.
- **Indians governed provinces for the first time**, and in doing so proved to the minority that majority rule would look and sound like the majority.
- **The Muslim League was destroyed and then rebuilt**. At 4.4 percent of the Muslim vote in 1937, it was finished. By 1940 it was tabling a resolution about independent states, and by 1946 it would sweep. That transformation is the single most important political fact of the 1940s.
- **Both nationalisms hardened their theory** in 1937 and 1939, and each used the other's hardest statement as proof of its own case.

And there is one more thing, easy to miss. In 1939 the Viceroy declared that India was at war with Germany without consulting a single Indian. Every elected Indian government resigned in protest. The provinces went under British officials again.

So on the eve of the biggest war in history, India had no functioning Indian governments, a Congress out of office, and a Muslim League celebrating a Day of Deliverance. Part 6 begins there.

But before the war, we have unfinished business. Part 5 goes back to 1928 and deals with the men who chose a different method entirely, and with the two accusations that follow Gandhi more closely than any others: that he could have saved Bhagat Singh, and that he destroyed Subhas Chandra Bose.

Timeline for Part 4

DATE	EVENT
26 January 1930	Independence Day observed following the Lahore Congress.
12 March to 6 April 1930	The Salt March. Gandhi walks about 240 miles to Dandi.
21 May 1930	Dharasana salt works. Webb Miller's report goes worldwide.
November 1930 to January 1931	First Round Table Conference. Congress absent.
5 March 1931	Gandhi Irwin Pact.

DATE	EVENT
23 March 1931	Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev hanged at Lahore. See Part 5.
September to December 1931	Second Round Table Conference. Gandhi attends alone for Congress and clashes with Ambedkar.
16 August 1932	Communal Award. Separate electorates extended to the Depressed Classes, about 71 seats.
20 September 1932	Gandhi begins his fast unto death at Yerawada jail.
24 September 1932	Poona Pact. Separate electorates dropped, reserved seats raised to 148 in joint electorates.
1932 and 1933	Harijan Sevak Sangh founded. The weekly <i>Harijan</i> begins.
1933 to 1934	Gandhi's nine month anti untouchability tour. A bomb is thrown at his car in Poona.
1935	Government of India Act. Provincial autonomy, franchise of about thirty million.
1936 to 1937	Iqbal's letters to Jinnah urging a mass Muslim politics.
February 1937	Provincial elections. Congress 711 of 1,585. Muslim League 109 of 482 Muslim seats and about 4.4 percent of Muslim votes.
July 1937	Congress ministries take office in eight provinces. United Provinces coalition talks fail.
December 1937	Savarkar's Ahmedabad address states the two nation position for the Hindu Mahasabha.
15 November 1938	Pirpur Report presented.
1939	<i>We or Our Nationhood Defined</i> published under Golwalkar's name.
March 1939	Sharif Report on Bihar.
3 September 1939	Viceroy Linlithgow declares India at war without consulting Indian opinion.
October to November 1939	Congress ministries resign.
22 December 1939	Muslim League observes Day of Deliverance.
23 March 1940	Lahore Resolution, moved by A. K. Fazlul Huq. The word Pakistan does not appear in it.

Word list

Communal Award	The British decision of August 1932 assigning separate electorates to religious and social communities, including the Depressed Classes.
Depressed Classes	The official term of the period for the communities now called Scheduled Castes or Dalits.
Joint electorate with reserved seats	Everyone votes together, but certain seats can only be won by candidates from a specified community. The system adopted in the Poona Pact and still used in India.
Fast unto death	A fast declared to continue until either a demand is met or the faster dies.
Varnashrama	The traditional fourfold order of Hindu society. Gandhi defended it in his earlier years while condemning untouchability. Ambedkar regarded the two positions as incompatible.
Harijan	Literally children of God. Gandhi's name for untouchables, rejected by Ambedkar and by most Dalit organisations as patronising.
Provincial autonomy	The 1935 Act arrangement giving elected Indian ministries real control of provincial government, subject to the Governor's emergency powers.
Unionist Party	The cross community landholders' party that governed Punjab from 1937, uniting Muslim, Hindu and Sikh landed interests.
Krishak Praja Party	A. K. Fazlul Huq's peasants and tenants party in Bengal, which won in 1937 on land reform rather than religion.
Khudai Khidmatgars	Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's nonviolent movement in the North West Frontier Province, allied to the Congress.
Pirpur Report	The Muslim League's 1938 inquiry into the treatment of Muslims under Congress provincial rule.
Day of Deliverance	22 December 1939, observed by the Muslim League to mark the resignation of the Congress ministries.

Sources used in Part 4

- Text of the Communal Award, announced by Ramsay MacDonald, 16 August 1932, and the text of the Poona Pact, 24 September 1932.
- B. R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, 1945, and his statements to the Round Table Conferences.
- Gandhi's writings in *Young India* and *Harijan* on untouchability and on the fast of September 1932, in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, for the account of the United Provinces coalition talks of 1937 and the role of Nehru.

- Official results of the 1937 provincial elections, including the Muslim seat and vote figures: 482 Muslim seats, 109 won by the League, 7,319,445 Muslim votes cast and 321,772 to the League.
- Report of the Inquiry Committee appointed by the Council of the All India Muslim League, known as the Pirpur Report, 15 November 1938. Full text available on the Internet Archive.
- The Sharif Report on Bihar, March 1939.
- Uma Kaura and other scholarly studies of Congress and League relations from 1937 to 1939 in *Modern Asian Studies* and related journals.
- M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1939, together with the published scholarship on its disputed authorship and its later withdrawal from circulation.
- Text of the Lahore Resolution of the All India Muslim League, 23 March 1940.
- Government of India Act 1935, text and official summaries.
- Webb Miller's despatches from Dharasana, May 1930.

COMING NEXT

Part 5: Bhagat Singh and Bose, the Betrayal Charges. Could Gandhi have saved Bhagat Singh? What the Gandhi Irwin Pact actually covered, what Gandhi wrote to Irwin and how hard he pushed. What Bhagat Singh himself thought of Gandhi's methods. Then Tripuri in 1939 and whether Bose was pushed out, what Bose actually said about Gandhi, about Savarkar and about the Hindu Mahasabha, the Indian National Army, and what the declassified files do and do not show about his death.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART FIVE OF TWELVE

Bhagat Singh and Bose

*The two betrayal charges: could Gandhi have saved Bhagat Singh,
and did he destroy Subhas Chandra Bose?*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I will be honest about something before you start this part.

Bhagat Singh is a Punjabi boy from a Sandhu Jat family, hanged at twenty three, and I grew up with his photograph in shops and on the backs of trucks. If any chapter in this book was going to make me write with my heart instead of my head, it was this one.

So I have been extra careful here. I have applied Rule 6 from Part 1 more strictly than anywhere else in this series: for a claim that somebody "could have saved" another person, three things must be shown, that he had the power, that he knew he had it, and that he chose not to use it. If any one is missing, it is an opinion and not a fact.

What I found surprised me in both directions. The famous accusation against Gandhi turns out to be substantially wrong on its main point and substantially right on a smaller point that nobody usually makes. And Bhagat Singh's own writings turn out to contain an argument about Gandhi that is far more interesting than the one made on his behalf today.

One more thing. In this part I have again had to write that I could not verify a widely circulated quotation. I have printed that finding rather than quietly using the quote or quietly dropping it. If that irritates you, I understand, but a book that only reports the checks that succeed is not a book that has checked anything.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART FIVE

CHAPTER 1	Who Bhagat Singh actually was
CHAPTER 2	The case, the ordinance and who held the power
CHAPTER 3	Could Gandhi have saved him?
CHAPTER 4	What Bhagat Singh thought of Gandhi
CHAPTER 5	The others: did the Congress abandon the revolutionaries?
CHAPTER 6	Tripuri 1939: was Bose pushed out?
CHAPTER 7	What Bose actually said about Gandhi and about Savarkar
CHAPTER 8	The Indian National Army and what it really achieved
CHAPTER 9	What happened to Bose
CLOSING	Timeline, word list, sources, what comes next

CHAPTER ONE

Who Bhagat Singh Actually Was

He is remembered as a brave young man who threw a bomb and was hanged. That description is true and it is also a way of not listening to him. He was a reader, a writer and a political thinker with a specific programme, and almost nobody who invokes his name today agrees with it.

The making of him

Bhagat Singh was born in 1907 in the Lyallpur district of Punjab, in a Sandhu Jat Sikh family already deep in politics. His uncle Ajit Singh was a revolutionary who had been exiled. He was twelve when Jallianwala Bagh happened, and he went to Amritsar and brought back soil from the garden.

He joined the Non Cooperation Movement as a schoolboy and left his government school for the National College at Lahore. When Gandhi suspended the movement after Chauri Chaura in 1922, Bhagat Singh, then fifteen, took the lesson that many young men of his generation took: this method stops just when it starts working.

By 1928 he was a leading figure in the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. Note the middle word. It was added at his urging. His aim was not simply to remove the British but to change who owned the land and the factories afterwards.

The two acts

The killing of Saunders, 17 December 1928. In October 1928 Lala Lajpat Rai led a demonstration against the Simon Commission at Lahore and was beaten in a lathi charge ordered by Superintendent James Scott. He died on 17 November. The HSRA decided to kill Scott. On 17 December they shot the wrong man, John Saunders, an assistant superintendent, along with a head constable, Chanan Singh, who pursued them. Bhagat Singh escaped Lahore in disguise.

The Assembly bomb, 8 April 1929. This is the act that is most misunderstood. Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw two low intensity bombs into an empty area of the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi. The bombs were deliberately designed not to kill, and nobody was killed. They scattered leaflets, shouted their slogans, and then **stood still and allowed themselves to be arrested**, when they could easily have escaped in the confusion.

That was the whole point. Their leaflet said the aim was to make the deaf hear. They wanted a trial, because a trial was a stage, and a stage was the only way for a group of unknown young men to put a political argument in front of the entire country. It worked exactly as designed.

The hunger strike

In jail they demanded to be treated as political prisoners rather than as ordinary criminals: books, paper, decent food, dignity. When it was refused they went on hunger strike in June 1929. It lasted

months and was force fed and brutal. On 13 September 1929, Jatindra Nath Das died on the sixty third day of his fast. His funeral procession in Calcutta was enormous.

This is the period in which Bhagat Singh became a national figure, and he did it not by killing anybody but by starving in a prison cell.

What he actually believed

Anyone who wants to claim him should first read what he wrote, because it is specific and it is inconvenient for most people who quote him.

- **He was a socialist and a revolutionary**, not simply a nationalist. His stated goal was the end of the exploitation of man by man, and he said plainly that swaraj which merely replaced white masters with brown ones was worthless.
- **He was an atheist**. In October 1930, in the condemned cell, he wrote an essay called *Why I Am an Atheist*, explaining that he had abandoned belief in God on rational grounds and refusing to take up religion for comfort as death approached.
- **He was fiercely against communal politics**. He wrote an article on communal riots in 1928 attacking both Hindu and Muslim communal leaders and the newspapers that fed the poison, and arguing that class was the real dividing line and religion the distraction.
- **He did not glorify violence for its own sake**. In *To Young Political Workers*, written on 2 February 1931 in the condemned cell, he explicitly warned that bombs and pistols do not make a revolution, that the sword of revolution is sharpened on the whetstone of ideas, and that the real work was organising workers and peasants over years.

WORTH PAUSING ON

A Sikh born atheist socialist who attacked Hindu and Muslim communal organisations by name, who said that armed action without mass organisation was useless, and who wanted a revolution against Indian landlords and industrialists as much as against the British.

That is the actual Bhagat Singh. Whenever you see his face used to argue for something, it is worth asking whether the person using it has read a single page he wrote.

CHAPTER TWO

The Case, the Ordinance and Who Held the Power

To judge whether anyone could have saved him, you first have to know exactly how he was convicted and who had the legal authority to stop it. This chapter is dry. It is also the part that decides the argument.

The Lahore Conspiracy Case

Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were tried for the murder of Saunders, along with a wider conspiracy charge. The trial began in July 1929 and ran into 1930, and the accused used it as a platform exactly as intended, shouting slogans, refusing to cooperate and turning the courtroom into a political theatre.

The government found this intolerable, and here is where it becomes important.

The ordinance of 1 May 1930

The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, issued an ordinance creating a **special tribunal** of three judges to try the case. This tribunal had extraordinary powers. It could proceed in the absence of the accused. It could dispense with the ordinary procedures. And crucially, **its verdict could not be appealed to the High Court**. The only remaining route was a petition to the Privy Council in London, which was a narrow legal appeal rather than a rehearing.

Understand what this means. The government of India used emergency powers to construct a court specifically designed to convict these men quickly and to remove the normal appeal. That is not a legal system reaching a regrettable conclusion. That is an executive decision to hang them, executed through legal machinery.

The tribunal delivered its judgement on 7 October 1930. Death by hanging for Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. The Privy Council appeal was dismissed in February 1931.

So who could have stopped it?

After the Privy Council dismissal, exactly one person had the legal power to commute the sentence: **the Viceroy**, exercising the prerogative of mercy. Not the courts. Not the Congress. Not Gandhi.

And the Viceroy was not a free agent either. He was under pressure from the Secretary of State in London, from the Punjab administration which regarded the HSRA as a live terrorist threat, and from a British official class that had watched a police officer shot dead in the street and would not accept mercy for it.

Keep that structure in mind for the next chapter. Gandhi could ask. Only Irwin could decide, and Irwin was answering to London.

CHAPTER THREE

Could Gandhi Have Saved Him?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Gandhi signed a pact with Irwin on 5 March 1931 and got Bhagat Singh hanged eighteen days later. He had the whole country behind him. He could have made the release of Bhagat Singh a condition of the pact and Irwin would have had no choice. He did not, because he was jealous of a young man who was more popular than he was, and because he could not tolerate a rival method. Gandhi let him hang."

Step one: what the pact actually covered

The Gandhi Irwin Pact of 5 March 1931 provided for the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement and, on the government side, the release of political prisoners **not convicted of violence**, the return of confiscated property, and the right of coastal populations to make salt for personal use.

Bhagat Singh was convicted of murder. He fell outside the category the pact dealt with, and he did so by definition, not by oversight. That is why he was not released by the pact.

This is worth stating clearly because it is the source of much of the confusion. The pact did not exclude him through some sly drafting. It was an agreement about a nonviolent movement, and he had not been part of a nonviolent movement.

Step two: did Gandhi try at all?

This is the part where the popular claim simply fails against the record. He tried, repeatedly, and there is paper.

- He raised the case with Irwin during the negotiations themselves, which ran from 17 February to 5 March 1931. Irwin's own account records the conversation.
- He pressed again after the pact was signed, when the executions were announced.
- On **19 March 1931** he appealed to Irwin again for commutation.
- On the **morning of 23 March 1931**, the day of the hanging, he wrote a personal letter to the Viceroy making a final plea, in which he wrote that he had poured his whole being, heart and soul, into the appeal.
- Afterwards, in *Young India* on 11 June 1931, he stated publicly that he had interested himself in the movement for the commutation of the death sentence of Bhagat Singh and his comrades.

So the claim "Gandhi did nothing" is not a matter of interpretation. It is false, and it is refutable from documents that anybody can read.

Step three: could he have forced it?

Now the harder question, and I am going to give the accusers their strongest ground.

The case that he could have. Gandhi had leverage in February 1931 that he never had again. The British wanted the civil disobedience movement stopped and they wanted Congress at the Round Table Conference. Gandhi could have said: no pact until the three men live. He did not. He asked as a supplicant when he could have demanded as a negotiator. And when a man with that much leverage asks politely instead of insisting, the outcome is not an accident.

The case that he could not. Irwin was not free to concede. Commuting the sentence of men convicted of shooting a British police officer, at the request of the leader of a movement the government had just spent a year suppressing, would have been read in London and in the Punjab administration as surrender to terrorism. Irwin later wrote about the pressure he was under and the impossibility, as he saw it, of commutation. There is also the government's own behaviour on the day, which tells you a great deal: the execution was carried out on the **evening** of 23 March, roughly eleven hours ahead of the scheduled time, and the bodies were removed secretly and cremated at Hussainiwala on the bank of the Sutlej during the night. A government that moves a hanging forward and disposes of the bodies in the dark is a government that is afraid of a reaction, not one that is weighing an appeal.

Gandhi's own stated reason. He argued that he could not make the pact conditional on the lives of three men, because that would turn a political settlement into a hostage negotiation, and because a pact obtained that way would have set a precedent that political agreements could be extracted by attaching lives to them.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI COULD HAVE SAVED BHAGAT SINGH"

THE POPULAR CHARGE IS FALSE. A SMALLER CHARGE IS TRUE.

FALSE that Gandhi did nothing. He raised it in the negotiations, appealed again on 19 March, wrote a personal letter to the Viceroy on the morning of the execution, and said so publicly afterwards. The documents exist.

FALSE that the pact betrayed him. The pact covered prisoners not convicted of violence. He was convicted of murder. He was never within its scope.

NOT PROVEN that Gandhi had the power. Only the Viceroy could commute, and the Viceroy was under binding pressure from London and the Punjab government. Applying Rule 6, the first requirement fails.

TRUE, and this is the real charge: Gandhi did not spend his maximum leverage on it. He asked and he did not insist. Whether insisting would have worked is unknowable. That he chose not to try is a fact, and people who loved Bhagat Singh were entitled to be angry about it then, as many were.

FALSE that jealousy explains it. There is no evidence for that motive anywhere in the record, and the same man's writings show him defending Bhagat Singh's courage and sincerity while rejecting his method.

THE KARACHI CONGRESS, MARCH 1931

The Congress session at Karachi opened days after the hangings. Gandhi was met with black flag demonstrations and was offered flowers made of black cloth, said to represent the ashes of the three men. The anger was immediate and it came from Congress workers, not from later critics.

The session passed a resolution which is a useful thing to read. It dissociated the Congress from political violence while placing on record its admiration for the bravery and sacrifice of the three men. Gandhi drafted that formula himself. It is exactly the position he had held for a decade: complete respect for the men, complete rejection of the method.

CHAPTER FOUR

What Bhagat Singh Thought of Gandhi

Here is the part that almost never appears in the argument, and it changes the shape of it.

He rejected the method, sharply

Bhagat Singh was a serious critic of Gandhi, and his criticism was political rather than personal. He believed that Gandhi's leadership had repeatedly stopped short, that Non Cooperation had been abandoned at Chauri Chaura when it should have been intensified, and that the Congress leadership represented the interests of the propertied classes and would settle for a transfer of power that changed nothing for the peasant and the worker.

In *To Young Political Workers*, written weeks before he was hanged, he set out an alternative: a disciplined revolutionary party, patient organisation among workers and peasants, and a socialist republic as the goal rather than dominion status.

And he refused to be saved

This is the fact that the modern accusation cannot accommodate.

Bhagat Singh did not file a mercy petition. He was explicitly opposed to doing so, and he discouraged efforts on his behalf that would have required an admission of repentance. What he did write, to the Punjab Governor, was a demand that since the government regarded them as prisoners of a war, they should be shot by a firing squad rather than hanged as criminals. That is not a plea for mercy. It is an argument about the terms of his death.

He also wrote, in the condemned cell, that he was going with a full sense of the value of his sacrifice, and that his execution would do more for the cause than his life could. He was twenty three and he had thought it through.

VERDICT ON THE WHOLE BHAGAT SINGH CHARGE

THE ARGUMENT IS BEING HAD OVER HIS HEAD

Bhagat Singh rejected Gandhi's politics and said so in print. Gandhi rejected Bhagat Singh's method and said so in print. Both were consistent, both were honest, and neither man pretended otherwise.

What did not happen is the modern story: a young man begging to be rescued and an old man refusing out of spite. Bhagat Singh refused to petition for mercy. Gandhi petitioned anyway, four times that we can document, and failed.

If you want to be angry at somebody over 23 March 1931, the person who signed the order, constituted the special tribunal by ordinance, removed the right of appeal and then moved the hanging forward by eleven hours was the Viceroy of India.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Others: Did the Congress Abandon the Revolutionaries?

Bhagat Singh was not alone and he was not the first. There is a whole parallel history running under the Congress story, and the question of what the Congress did about it is a fair one.

The scale of it

Armed revolutionary activity ran continuously from the Bengal partition of 1905 to the late 1930s. A short list of what that actually means:

- **The Ghadar movement.** Founded in 1913 in San Francisco by Punjabi migrants, mostly Sikhs, it planned a general mutiny in the Indian Army in 1915. It was betrayed and crushed. Kartar Singh Sarabha was hanged at Lahore in November 1915 at the age of nineteen. Bhagat Singh kept his photograph.
- **Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar** in Bengal, out of which came decades of assassinations of officials, bank robberies for funds and bomb factories.
- **The Kakori train action, 9 August 1925.** A group robbed a train carrying government money near Kakori in the United Provinces. Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Roshan Singh and Rajendra Lahiri were hanged in December 1927.
- **The Rampa rebellion, 1922 to 1924.** Alluri Sitarama Raju led a tribal armed uprising in the Godavari hills against forest laws that had destroyed a way of life. He was captured and shot in 1924.
- **The Chittagong armoury raid, 18 April 1930.** Surya Sen and a group including teenagers seized the armouries, cut the telegraph and held out in the hills. Pritilata Waddadar led an attack on a European club in 1932 and took poison rather than be captured. Kalpana Dutta was transported for life. Surya Sen was hanged in 1934 after being tortured.
- **The young women of Bengal.** Santi Ghosh and Suniti Choudhury, both schoolgirls, shot a district magistrate in December 1931. Bina Das fired at the Governor of Bengal at a university convocation in February 1932.

A DETAIL WORTH HOLDING ON TO

Ram Prasad Bismil, a Hindu who had been an Arya Samaj activist, and Ashfaqullah Khan, a devout Muslim, were the closest of friends and were hanged three days apart in December 1927 for the same action. Bismil wrote the line that every Indian schoolchild knows about the wish for sacrifice being in the heart.

In a book largely about how two communities came apart, it is worth recording that in the revolutionary underground they did not. That was true in 1857, as Part 1 showed, and it was still true in 1927.

The Andamans

Hundreds of convicted revolutionaries were transported to the Cellular Jail at Port Blair, where solitary confinement, the oil mill and floggings were routine. The prisoners fought back with the only weapon available, which was hunger strikes, in 1933 and again in 1937. Three men died in the 1933 strike. The 1937 strike, supported by protest in India, finally led to the repatriation of the political prisoners to mainland jails.

So what did the Congress actually do?

What it did not do. It never supported armed action, and it said so at every opportunity. Gandhi condemned individual violence consistently and without exception, from 1919 to the end of his life. Congress resolutions repeatedly dissociated the organisation from acts of political violence.

What it did do, which is usually left out. Congress campaigned continuously for the release of political prisoners, including men convicted of violence, and made it a standing demand in every negotiation with the government. When the Congress ministries took office in 1937 under the Government of India Act, one of their very first acts in province after province was to release political prisoners, including revolutionaries who had been in jail for years. This produced a serious confrontation with the Governors of the United Provinces and Bihar, who tried to block the releases, and the Congress ministries offered to resign over it. They won.

That is a concrete thing, done by people who disagreed with the prisoners' methods, at real political cost.

VERDICT ON "THE CONGRESS ABANDONED THE REVOLUTIONARIES"

HALF TRUE, AND THE TWO HALVES ARE DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

TRUE that the Congress refused to endorse armed struggle, refused to make individual cases a condition of any settlement, and that its leadership treated the revolutionaries as brave men following a mistaken path. To a family whose son was hanged, that distinction would have felt like abandonment.

FALSE that it did nothing for them. Prisoner release was a standing Congress demand, and when Congress finally held provincial power in 1937 it used that power to empty the jails of political prisoners against the resistance of British Governors.

The deeper point: the two wings were not really competing for the same job. The revolutionaries could not take power and never claimed they could, and after 1915 they never came close to a general mutiny. What they did was keep the British security state permanently expensive, frightened and morally exposed, and supply the emotional charge that constitutional politics could not generate. The mass movement and the armed underground fed each other far more than either admitted at the time.

CHAPTER SIX

Tripuri 1939: Was Bose Pushed Out?

The second betrayal charge. Unlike the first one, this charge is largely true, and the interesting question is not whether it happened but whether Gandhi was right on the substance.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Subhas Chandra Bose won the Congress presidency in a free election in 1939, defeating Gandhi's own candidate. Gandhi could not accept it. The entire Working Committee resigned to sabotage him, he was made powerless, forced to resign and then expelled from the party he had just been elected to lead. Gandhi destroyed the one man who could have won India's freedom by force."

What happened

Bose was Congress president at Haripura in 1938 with Gandhi's support and had a good year. In January 1939 he stood for a second term. Gandhi did not want him to, and the old guard put up Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya.

Bose won, by **1,580 votes to 1,377**. It was a genuine election and the result was clear.

Gandhi's public response was a sentence that tells you everything about how personally he took it.

"Pattabhi's defeat is more mine than his."

Gandhi, statement following the Congress presidential election result, February 1939

Then the machinery moved. Twelve of the fifteen members of the Congress Working Committee resigned, leaving the newly elected president with no executive. At the Tripuri session in March 1939, with Bose seriously ill and unable to attend most proceedings, Govind Ballabh Pant moved a resolution expressing confidence in the old Working Committee and requesting the president to nominate his new committee **in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji**. It passed.

Read that formula again. It asked an elected president to choose his own cabinet according to the wishes of a man who held no office in the organisation at all. Gandhi had not been a member of the Congress since 1934.

Bose resigned the presidency on 29 April 1939. On 3 May 1939 he founded the Forward Bloc within the Congress. In August 1939 he was removed from the presidency of the Bengal Congress and debarred from holding any elective Congress office for three years.

Was he pushed out?

Yes. Not by a coup and not illegally, but by a coordinated refusal to serve under him which made his office unusable, followed by disciplinary action. Anyone who denies this is not reading the sequence.

It is also worth saying what kind of pushing out it was. Nobody was arrested and nothing was falsified. It was the oldest manoeuvre in organisational politics: the establishment declined to work with the winner until the winner had to leave. That is legal. It is not democratic in spirit, and the people who did it knew that.

What were they actually arguing about?

This is the part that matters more than the manoeuvring, and both positions deserve to be stated properly.

Bose's position. War in Europe was obviously coming. Britain would be at her weakest and most distracted. The Congress should therefore give the British a six month ultimatum to concede independence and, if refused, launch an all out struggle timed to Britain's crisis. India should take advantage of the enemy's difficulty, because that is what every nation in history has done.

Gandhi's position. The Congress was not organisationally ready for a mass struggle in 1939. The communal question was unresolved. Congress ministries were in office in eight provinces doing real work. And a struggle launched to exploit somebody else's catastrophe would forfeit the moral position on which the entire method rested.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI PUSHED BOSE OUT"

TRUE

The elected president was made unable to function by the mass resignation of the executive, was then asked by a session resolution to select his committee according to the wishes of a man holding no office, and was subsequently debarred from Congress office for three years. That is being pushed out.

On the substance, the honest scoring is split. Bose was right that war was coming and that it was the opportunity of the century, and Part 7 will show you just how right he was about British weakness. Gandhi was right that the Congress in 1939 was not ready and that the communal question was unsettled, and Part 6 will show you what actually happened when Congress did launch a mass struggle in 1942 without solving it.

What is not defensible is the method. A movement that had spent twenty years telling Indians that means matter as much as ends removed an elected leader through a procedural squeeze. Bose was entitled to his bitterness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

What Bose Actually Said About Gandhi and About Savarkar

Bose is quoted constantly, by people who agree with each other about nothing, and most of those quotations are never dated. Here are the ones I could verify, and one that I could not.

On Gandhi

Bose was a severe political critic of Gandhi. In his book *The Indian Struggle*, written in exile in the 1930s, he analysed Gandhi's leadership sharply, arguing that Gandhi repeatedly halted movements at the point of maximum pressure and lacked a strategy for the final seizure of power.

And then there is this, from Azad Hind Radio on **6 July 1944**, broadcast while Bose was leading an army against the British and Gandhi was in India having just been released from detention.

*Bose addressed Gandhi as the **Father of the Nation**, told him that India's last war of independence had begun, and asked for his blessings and good wishes in the holy war of liberation.*

Message to Gandhiji, Azad Hind Radio, 6 July 1944. This is the first recorded use of the title Father of the Nation for Gandhi.

Think about what that means. The title that Gandhi is known by in India was given to him by the man who is usually presented as his greatest enemy, in the middle of a war, from a radio station in Southeast Asia.

Both things are true at once. Bose thought Gandhi's strategy was wrong and said so in print for a decade. Bose also regarded him as the father of the nation and asked for his blessing. Political disagreement and personal reverence are not contradictory, and every account that keeps only one half is misleading you.

On Savarkar

This one is genuinely surprising and I want to give it accurately, because it cuts against what most people on both sides expect.

In a broadcast on **25 June 1944**, Bose praised Savarkar. His reason was entirely practical. Savarkar was urging Indian young men to enlist in the British Indian Army, which the Congress condemned. Bose's point was that those recruits were exactly the trained soldiers who could later be captured and turned into his own Indian National Army, which is precisely what had happened at Singapore in 1942.

"When due to misguided political whims and lack of vision, almost all the leaders of Congress party have been decrying all the soldiers in Indian Army as mercenaries, it is heartening to know that Veer Savarkar is fearlessly exhorting the youths of India to enlist in armed forces. These enlisted youths themselves provide us with trained men and soldiers for our Indian National Army."

Subhas Chandra Bose, Azad Hind Radio broadcast, 25 June 1944

Two things must be said about this quotation, and both matter.

First, it is real and it should not be explained away by people who find it uncomfortable. Bose said it, on the record, and it is directly relevant to the charge examined in Part 6 that Savarkar's recruitment drive was collaboration with the British. Bose, the man leading an army against the British, thought that recruitment was useful to him.

Second, it should not be inflated by people who find it convenient. This is a statement about military recruitment, not an endorsement of Hindu nationalism. Bose was a lifelong opponent of communal politics. His Forward Bloc criticised the Hindu Mahasabha. He built the Indian National Army deliberately across religion, with Hindu, Muslim and Sikh officers eating together and a chain of command that ignored community, and his political vision for India was explicitly secular. A man can praise an opponent's recruitment campaign because it serves his war and still reject that opponent's politics entirely.

A QUOTATION I COULD NOT VERIFY

The question I was asked, and which is asked constantly online, is what Bose said about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh working for the British.

I looked, and I could not find a verifiable, dated, sourced statement by Bose specifically about the RSS. A number of statements are attributed to him on this subject and circulate widely, and I could not trace them to a broadcast, a letter, a speech or a published work.

That is not proof that he never said anything of the kind. It means that by the rules of this book the attributed statements fail Rule 1 and cannot be used as evidence. What I can document is the 25 June 1944 broadcast above, which points in the opposite direction from what those attributed quotations claim.

The substantive question, whether the RSS or the Hindu Mahasabha collaborated with the British during the war, is a serious one and it deserves better than a disputed quotation. It has real documentary evidence on both sides, and I am going to test it properly in Part 6 with that evidence rather than with somebody's undated screenshot.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Indian National Army and What It Really Achieved

The INA lost every significant battle it fought. It also did more damage to British rule than any Indian military force since 1857. Both statements are true, and the resolution of that paradox is one of the most important things in this book.

The journey

Bose was placed under house arrest in Calcutta and escaped in January 1941, travelling in disguise through Peshawar to Kabul, then on to Moscow and Berlin. He spent two years in Germany, raised a small Indian Legion from prisoners of war, and got little from Hitler beyond politeness. In 1943 he transferred by German submarine to a Japanese one off Madagascar and reached Southeast Asia.

The Indian National Army already existed, formed from Indian prisoners taken at Singapore in 1942 largely through the work of Mohan Singh and Rash Behari Bose. It had collapsed once in disputes with the Japanese. Bose took command on 4 July 1943 and rebuilt it. On 21 October 1943 he proclaimed the Provisional Government of Free India, which was recognised by the Axis powers and which formally declared war on Britain and the United States.

He also raised the **Rani of Jhansi Regiment**, an all women combat unit under Captain Lakshmi Sahgal. There was nothing like it anywhere in the world at that time.

The military record

In 1944 the INA advanced with the Japanese into north east India, reaching Moirang in Manipur and taking part in the battles of Imphal and Kohima. Those battles were a catastrophe for the Japanese and for the INA. Supply lines failed, the monsoon arrived, disease and starvation destroyed units, and the retreat was appalling. By mid 1945 the INA had effectively ceased to exist as a fighting force.

Judged as a military campaign, it failed completely.

What it actually did

The decisive effect came after the shooting stopped, and it came from a British mistake.

In November 1945 the British put three INA officers on trial for treason at the Red Fort in Delhi. They chose, for reasons of even handedness, one Hindu, one Muslim and one Sikh: Prem Sahgal, Shah Nawaz Khan and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon.

The effect was the opposite of what was intended. The trials became the largest political event in India since 1942. The Congress formed a defence committee that included Jawaharlal Nehru, who put on his barrister's robes for the first time in twenty five years, alongside Bhulabhai Desai, Asaf Ali and Tej Bahadur Sapru. The Muslim League also defended them. For a few months in 1945

and 1946, the entire spectrum of Indian politics was united behind men who had taken up arms against the British Empire, and enormous crowds demonstrated in every major city.

And the men in the dock were soldiers. That is what changed everything. The British had ruled India for nearly two centuries on the loyalty of the Indian Army, as Part 1 explained. Now Indian soldiers were national heroes for having fought against it, and serving Indian soldiers were watching the trials.

In February 1946 came the Royal Indian Navy mutiny, when ratings at Bombay and elsewhere revolted, and Indian officials in Whitehall and Delhi began writing to each other about whether the instruments of British rule could still be relied on.

VERDICT ON "THE INA WON INDIA'S FREEDOM"

HALF TRUE, AND MOST PEOPLE PICK THE WRONG HALF

FALSE that the INA defeated the British militarily. It was destroyed at Imphal and Kohima and never came close to liberating Indian territory.

TRUE that it struck at the one thing British rule could not survive without, which was the reliability of the Indian armed forces, and that the trials of 1945 and 1946 did more damage than the fighting ever did.

The full weighing of this against the war, the economy and Gandhi's mass movements is the whole subject of Part 7, and I am not going to shortchange it here.

CHAPTER NINE

What Happened to Bose

Here is the honest state of the evidence, with nothing added and nothing removed.

The official account

On 18 August 1945, three days after Japan's surrender, a Japanese bomber carrying Bose crashed shortly after taking off from Taihoku, now Taipei, in Japanese occupied Taiwan. He suffered severe burns and died in a military hospital the same day. His ashes were later taken to the Renkoji temple in Tokyo, where they remain.

The four inquiries

INQUIRY	YEAR	CONCLUSION
Shah Nawaz Committee	1956	Bose died in the air crash. One of the three members, Suresh Chandra Bose, his brother, dissented.
Khosla Commission	1970	Bose died in the air crash.
Mukherjee Commission	2005	Bose did not die in the crash. It found no satisfactory evidence that the crash occurred and held that the eyewitness accounts of the death and cremation could not be relied upon. The Government of India rejected its findings.
Declassification of files	2015 and 2016	Over a hundred files released. The government's position remained that Bose died in the 1945 crash, restated in a reply under the Right to Information Act in May 2017.

What is genuinely unexplained

Being fair here means admitting that the conspiracy theories did not come from nowhere. Two things are odd and are documented.

- **The surveillance.** Declassified files confirm that Indian intelligence kept the families of Bose's relatives under surveillance for many years after 1945, into the late 1960s. Nobody has produced a satisfying explanation for watching the relatives of a man the state insists died in 1945.
- **The remains.** The ashes at Renkoji temple have never been subjected to DNA testing, despite decades of requests, and successive Indian governments of different parties have not resolved the matter.

And being fair also means saying that no verifiable evidence has ever been produced for any of the alternative stories, including the long running claim that a recluse in Uttar Pradesh known as Gumnamī Baba was Bose. That claim was examined and not established.

VERDICT ON THE DEATH OF BOSE

STILL DEBATED, WITH THE WEIGHT OF INQUIRY ON ONE SIDE

Two official inquiries concluded he died in the crash, one concluded he did not, and the government of the day rejected that third finding. No positive evidence of survival has ever been verified.

The reasonable position is that the crash account is the best supported one, and that the state's own conduct, the surveillance of his relatives and the refusal to test the remains, has done more than any conspiracy theorist to keep the question alive.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

Two men, two methods, two quarrels with Gandhi, and two accusations that have outlived everybody involved.

On Bhagat Singh, the popular charge collapses on contact with the documents. Gandhi appealed at least four times, in writing, including on the morning of the execution. The pact never covered men convicted of violence. Only the Viceroy could commute, and the Viceroy had London behind him and a special tribunal created by ordinance to make sure the outcome was not disturbed. The charge that survives is a narrower one: Gandhi asked, and did not insist, at the only moment in his life when insisting might have been possible.

On Bose, the charge substantially stands. He was elected and then squeezed out by people who would not serve under him, and then debarred. Gandhi's judgement on the substance was defensible and his method was not.

What both stories share is more important than either. Both men believed the Congress under Gandhi would stop short of the final step, and both were arguing about the same question: when the British are weak, do you strike, or do you keep your hands clean?

That question is about to be answered, because the war Bose predicted arrives, and Part 6 is about what everybody in India did during it. The Congress in jail. The Muslim League growing. The Hindu Mahasabha in coalition governments. The RSS deciding what kind of organisation it was. Savarkar recruiting for the British Army. And three million dead in Bengal.

Timeline for Part 5

DATE	EVENT
1907	Bhagat Singh born in the Lyallpur district of Punjab.
1897	Subhas Chandra Bose born at Cuttack.
1921	Bose passes the Indian Civil Service examination and resigns rather than serve.
November 1915	Kartar Singh Sarabha of the Ghadar movement hanged at Lahore, aged nineteen.
9 August 1925	Kakori train action. Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Roshan Singh and Lahiri hanged in December 1927.
1928	Hindustan Socialist Republican Association formed. Bhagat Singh publishes on communal riots.
17 November 1928	Lala Lajpat Rai dies after injuries from a lathi charge at Lahore.
17 December 1928	J. P. Saunders shot dead at Lahore.

DATE	EVENT
8 April 1929	Assembly bomb. Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt allow themselves to be arrested.
13 September 1929	Jatindra Nath Das dies on the sixty third day of the prison hunger strike.
18 April 1930	Chittagong armoury raid led by Surya Sen.
1 May 1930	Ordinance creates the special tribunal, removing appeal to the High Court.
7 October 1930	Death sentences pronounced.
October 1930	Bhagat Singh writes <i>Why I Am an Atheist</i> .
February 1931	Privy Council appeal dismissed.
2 February 1931	Bhagat Singh writes <i>To Young Political Workers</i> .
17 February to 5 March 1931	Gandhi Irwin negotiations. Gandhi raises the case.
19 March 1931	Gandhi appeals again for commutation.
23 March 1931	Gandhi writes to Irwin in the morning. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev hanged in the evening, about eleven hours early. Bodies cremated secretly at Hussainiwala.
Late March 1931	Karachi Congress. Black flags for Gandhi. Resolution admiring their bravery while rejecting violence.
1933 and 1937	Hunger strikes in the Cellular Jail at Port Blair. Political prisoners repatriated after 1937.
1937	Congress provincial ministries release political prisoners against the resistance of British Governors.
1938	Bose elected Congress president at Haripura with Gandhi's support.
January 1939	Bose defeats Pattabhi Sitaramayya 1,580 to 1,377. Gandhi: "Pattabhi's defeat is more mine than his."
March 1939	Tripuri session. Twelve of fifteen Working Committee members resign. Pant resolution passed.
29 April 1939	Bose resigns the Congress presidency.
3 May 1939	Forward Bloc founded.
August 1939	Bose debarred from elective Congress office for three years.
January 1941	Bose escapes from Calcutta.
1943	Submarine transfer to Southeast Asia. Takes command of the INA on 4 July. Provisional Government of Free India proclaimed 21 October.

DATE	EVENT
1944	Imphal and Kohima. The INA is destroyed as a fighting force.
25 June 1944	Azad Hind Radio broadcast praising Savarkar's recruitment drive.
6 July 1944	Azad Hind Radio broadcast calling Gandhi the Father of the Nation.
18 August 1945	Air crash at Taihoku, now Taipei.
November 1945	INA trials at the Red Fort. Nehru joins the defence team.
February 1946	Royal Indian Navy mutiny. See Part 7.
1956, 1970, 2005	Shah Nawaz Committee, Khosla Commission, Mukherjee Commission.
2015 and 2016	Declassification of Bose files.

Word list

HSRA	Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, the revolutionary organisation Bhagat Singh belonged to. The word Socialist was added at his urging.
Special tribunal	A court created by executive ordinance in May 1930 to try the Lahore Conspiracy Case, with no appeal to the High Court.
Privy Council	The highest court of appeal for British India, sitting in London.
Prerogative of mercy	The power of the Viceroy alone to commute a death sentence.
Mercy petition	A formal plea for a sentence to be reduced. Bhagat Singh refused to file one.
Forward Bloc	The party Bose founded within the Congress on 3 May 1939 after resigning the presidency.
Azad Hind	Free India. The name of Bose's provisional government proclaimed on 21 October 1943, and of its radio station.
Indian National Army	The force raised mainly from Indian prisoners of war captured by Japan, commanded by Bose from July 1943.
Rani of Jhansi Regiment	The all women combat unit of the INA, commanded by Captain Lakshmi Sahgal.
INA trials	The courts martial at the Red Fort from November 1945 which turned into a mass political event.

Sources used in Part 5

- Bhagat Singh, *Why I Am an Atheist*, October 1930, and *To Young Political Workers*, 2 February 1931, together with his 1928 writings on communal riots. Collected in various editions of his complete writings and available online.
- Judgement of the special tribunal in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, 7 October 1930, and the ordinance of 1 May 1930 constituting it.
- Gandhi's correspondence with Lord Irwin, February and March 1931, including the letter of 23 March 1931, in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.
- Gandhi, statement in *Young India*, 11 June 1931, on his efforts for commutation.
- Text of the Gandhi Irwin Pact, 5 March 1931.
- Resolution of the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress, March 1931.
- Records of the Congress presidential election of January 1939 and of the Tripuri session, March 1939, including the Pant resolution.
- Records of the Kakori conspiracy case, the Chittagong armoury raid and the Ghadar trials, and accounts of the Cellular Jail hunger strikes of 1933 and 1937.
- Correspondence between the Congress provincial ministries and the Governors of the United Provinces and Bihar over the release of political prisoners, 1937 and 1938.
- Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, for his assessment of Gandhi's leadership.
- *Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose*, including the Azad Hind Radio message to Gandhi of 6 July 1944.
- Azad Hind Radio broadcast of 25 June 1944 on recruitment and Savarkar.
- Report of the Shah Nawaz Committee, 1956; Report of the Khosla Commission, 1970; Report of the Justice M. K. Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry, 2005, and the Government of India's action taken response rejecting it.
- Files on Subhas Chandra Bose declassified by the Government of India in 2015 and 2016, and the Ministry of Home Affairs reply under the Right to Information Act, May 2017.

COMING NEXT

Part 6: The War Years, Who Did What. The Cripps Mission and whether rejecting it was a blunder. Quit India in 1942: how big it was, how many died, how many were jailed. What the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS were doing while the Congress leadership sat in prison, including the coalition governments the Mahasabha formed with the Muslim League. The charge that the RSS worked for the British, tested with documents rather than slogans. Savarkar's recruitment drive and his mercy petitions from the Andamans, quoted in full. And the Bengal famine of 1943.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART SIX OF TWELVE

The War Years: Who Did What

*Cripps, Quit India, the coalition governments, the recruitment drive,
the mercy petitions and three million dead in Bengal*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the part of the book most likely to make somebody angry with me, and I have thought carefully about how to write it.

The years 1939 to 1945 are the ones over which today's Indian political argument is really being fought. Who was in jail and who was in office. Who marched and who abstained. Who recruited for whose army. Every side has a version, and every version consists of true facts with the inconvenient facts removed.

So I have made a rule for this part. **For every organisation, I state what the documents show it did, and then I state what the strongest defence of that conduct is, before I give a verdict.** I have done that for the Congress, for the Muslim League, for the Hindu Mahasabha and for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, in the same format, with the same standard of evidence.

I also want to draw one distinction very early, because almost every argument about this period collapses without it. **Staying out of something is not the same as working against it.** Abstention and collaboration are different accusations requiring different evidence, and I have not allowed proof of the first to be used as proof of the second. If that disappoints readers on one side, it should equally reassure them that I have applied the same rule when the evidence pointed the other way.

And I have printed the mercy petitions in the words in which they were written, along with the defence offered for them. Readers can judge.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART SIX

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CLOSING	Timeline, word list, sources, what comes next

CHAPTER ONE

1939: India Goes to War Without Being Asked

Everything in this part follows from one decision taken by one man in one afternoon.

The declaration

On 3 September 1939 the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, announced that India was at war with Germany. He did not consult the Central Legislative Assembly. He did not consult the eight provincial governments that Indians had elected and were running. He did not consult the Congress or the Muslim League.

Three hundred and eighty million people were taken into the largest war in human history by the signature of one appointed official.

Whatever you think of what the Congress did next, understand the position it was in. Congress ministers were governing provinces under a constitution that had just been shown to be worthless the moment it mattered.

The Congress resigns

The Congress position was not simple refusal. It said: state your war aims, tell us whether they include freedom for India, and treat India as a free country whose government decides its own participation. Linlithgow would not.

So in October and November 1939 the Congress ministries resigned in all eight provinces. The provinces went back under the direct rule of British Governors.

Look at what that meant in practice, because it is the hinge of the whole period.

- The British could now govern most of India by decree, without any elected Indian body to obstruct them.
- The Congress had taken itself out of power voluntarily, at the exact moment when power was about to become valuable.
- And the field was left open to whoever chose to cooperate.

Jinnah understood immediately. He called on Muslims to observe 22 December 1939 as a **Day of Deliverance** from Congress rule.

The August Offer and the individual satyagraha

In August 1940, with France fallen and Britain alone, Linlithgow made the August Offer: dominion status as an objective at some future date, more Indians on the Viceroy's Executive Council, a war advisory council. Congress rejected it as far too little.

Buried in that offer, however, was a sentence of enormous consequence. The British stated that they could not transfer power to any system of government whose authority was **denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life**. That was a veto, and everybody could see whose

hand it was placed in. From 1940 onward the Muslim League did not merely have a demand. It had a guarantee that nothing could be settled over its objection.

Gandhi's response to the war was a limited campaign called individual satyagraha, beginning in October 1940. Chosen individuals would publicly make an anti war speech and be arrested. Vinoba Bhave was the first, Nehru the second. It was deliberately small, symbolic and controlled. About twenty five thousand people were eventually arrested. It kept the Congress alive without provoking a confrontation Gandhi did not think it could win.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cripps Mission: Was Rejecting It a Blunder?

By March 1942 the war had arrived at India's border, and Britain suddenly needed Indian cooperation very badly indeed.

Why Britain sent him

Singapore fell on 15 February 1942, and with it about eighty five thousand Allied troops. Rangoon fell in March. The Japanese were in Burma and moving towards the Indian frontier. Roosevelt was pressing Churchill publicly about the moral position of fighting a war for freedom while holding India by force, and Chiang Kai shek had visited India in February and said the same thing.

So Churchill, who loathed the idea, sent Sir Stafford Cripps to Delhi in March 1942 with an offer.

What was actually offered

- **Dominion status after the war**, with the right to leave the Commonwealth. This was a real advance in principle.
- **A constituent assembly after the war**, elected by the provincial legislatures, to write India's constitution.
- **The right of any province not to accede** to the new Indian union, and instead to keep its existing constitutional position or negotiate a separate one with Britain.
- **For the duration of the war, nothing changed.** Defence remained entirely in British hands and the Viceroy kept his powers.

Why Congress rejected it

Two reasons, and they are different in kind.

The immediate reason. There was no transfer of any real power now. Congress wanted a national government with genuine authority, including a share in defence, for the duration of the war. Cripps could not offer it, because Churchill and Linlithgow had made sure he could not. Cripps appears to have gone beyond his brief in his conversations and then had to retreat, which poisoned the whole thing.

The deeper reason. The non accession clause. By offering provinces the right to stay out of the Indian union, the British had for the first time conceded the *principle* of partition in an official document. Congress saw that clearly and rejected it for that reason as much as any other. The Muslim League also rejected the offer, because it did not give Pakistan outright, but the League understood what it had gained.

THE "POST DATED CHEQUE" QUOTE

Gandhi is famously said to have called the Cripps offer "a post dated cheque on a crashing bank". The phrase "post dated cheque" is well attested as his. The addition "on a crashing bank" or "on a failing bank" is generally attributed to a journalist rather than to Gandhi himself, and Gandhi is reported to have declined to endorse the longer version.

I flag it because it is a small, harmless example of exactly how quotations grow in transmission. If it happens to a famous line about a banking metaphor, consider what happens to lines about religion and violence.

Was rejecting it a blunder?

The case that it was. Dominion status with the right of secession was more than Congress had ever been offered. Accepting it would have put Congress inside the government during the war, in the room when decisions were made, and in a strong position at the end of it. Instead Congress rejected it, launched Quit India, and spent the next three years in prison while its rival grew. On this reading, 1942 is the year Congress handed India to Jinnah.

The case that it was not. The offer gave nothing during the war, which was the only period that mattered, and Churchill had made certain of that. Congress would have been asked to take responsibility for an unpopular war effort, including conscription and rationing and the requisitioning that helped starve Bengal, while holding no real power. And the non accession clause meant that accepting Cripps was accepting the principle of Pakistan in 1942 rather than 1947, before the Congress had any bargaining position at all.

VERDICT ON THE CRIPPS REJECTION

STILL DEBATED, AND THE USUAL FRAMING IS WRONG

The rejection itself was defensible on the terms available. An offer of jam tomorrow, with the principle of partition conceded today and no power in the meantime, was not obviously worth taking.

The real error came next. Having rejected the constitutional route, the Congress chose open confrontation four months later, in the middle of a war, against a government with emergency powers, with no plan for what would happen when its entire leadership was arrested within hours. It is possible to think that rejecting Cripps was right and that Quit India was badly conceived, and after a good deal of reading, that is where I have ended up.

CHAPTER THREE

Quit India: How Big It Was and What It Cost

The last great mass movement of the freedom struggle. It was crushed in weeks and it changed everything anyway.

Do or die

On 8 August 1942 the All India Congress Committee met at Gowalia Tank in Bombay and passed the Quit India resolution. Gandhi's speech that night contained the phrase that defined it: he gave the country a mantra, *do or die*, telling Indians that they should either free India or die in the attempt, and that they must not live to see the perpetuation of their slavery.

He intended, by his own account, to open negotiations after the resolution. He never got the chance.

Nine August

Before dawn on 9 August 1942, in an operation planned well in advance, the British arrested the entire Congress leadership across India. Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Azad and the whole Working Committee were in custody before the country woke up. The Congress was declared unlawful. Its offices were seized and its funds frozen. Press censorship was total.

The government had decapitated the movement in a single night. What followed was therefore something nobody had designed: a leaderless national uprising.

What people actually did

It varied enormously by region, and it was far more violent than any previous Gandhian campaign.

- **Communications were attacked.** Railway lines were torn up, telegraph and telephone wires cut, stations and post offices burned. In Bihar and eastern United Provinces, rail links were severed for weeks.
- **Parallel governments were declared.** The *Prati Sarkar* at Satara in Maharashtra under Nana Patil ran courts and collected revenue for years, into 1945. The *Jatiya Sarkar* at Tamluk in Midnapore, Bengal, ran relief and administration and even had a women's wing. Ballia in the United Provinces and Talcher in Orissa also declared their own governments for a time.
- **Underground work.** Aruna Asaf Ali hoisted the flag at Gowalia Tank and went underground for years. Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan ran a socialist underground network. Usha Mehta, a twenty two year old, ran the Congress Radio, a secret transmitter that broadcast news past the censors until she was caught in November 1942 and jailed.

What it cost

The repression was on a scale not seen since 1857, and the figures are disputed in the usual pattern.

FIGURE	STATUS
More than 90,000 arrested, some accounts over 100,000	Widely accepted. Includes the entire national and most of the provincial leadership.
Official British figure of roughly 1,000 killed in police and military firing	The government's own count. Almost certainly an undercount.
Congress estimate of up to 10,000 killed	A political estimate made without access to records. Treat with caution.
Mass fines, public floggings, burning of villages, and machine gunning of crowds from aircraft in some districts	Documented in official correspondence and in later inquiries. Not disputed.

Fifty seven battalions of troops were used. The movement was broken in most places within six to eight weeks, although pockets held out for years.

VERDICT ON QUIT INDIA

A MILITARY FAILURE THAT SUCCEEDED AT SOMETHING ELSE

It failed at its stated aim. The British did not quit. The movement was suppressed, its leaders were in jail until 1945, and India's politics was surrendered to its rivals for three years. Anyone who claims Quit India drove the British out has to explain why the British were still there in 1945 with the Congress in prison.

It succeeded at something its planners had not planned. It proved that holding India now required a level of coercion that a democratic country could not sustain indefinitely and could not explain to its allies. Fifty seven battalions and aircraft firing on crowds, in the middle of a war against fascism, is not a sustainable system of government. British officials began writing to each other about the long term impossibility of the position, and Part 7 will show you those documents.

And it carried an enormous price, which the next three chapters are about.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Muslim League: The Three Years That Made It

In Part 4 we left the Muslim League with 4.4 percent of the Muslim vote and no provincial governments. Here is how that changed, and it is not a mystery.

Jinnah's strategy

Jinnah did not launch a movement. He did the opposite, deliberately. His approach through the war was:

- **Do not obstruct the war effort.** The League did not oppose recruitment or supply. This made it, from the British point of view, the responsible party.
- **Do not go to jail.** While the entire Congress leadership was imprisoned from August 1942 to June 1945, Jinnah was free, speaking, travelling and organising.
- **Take office wherever possible.** Office meant patronage, and patronage meant organisation.
- **Hold the veto.** The August Offer of 1940 had given the League the assurance that power would not be transferred over its objection. Jinnah's task was simply to remain the recognised voice of Muslim India, and let the arithmetic do the rest.

What that produced

Between 1942 and 1944 the League moved into government in province after province, mostly by coalition and defection rather than by election.

PROVINCE	WHAT HAPPENED
Sindh	A League ministry under Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah from 1943.
Bengal	Fazlul Huq's coalition fell in March 1943 and Khwaja Nazimuddin formed a League ministry the following month. This is the government in office during the famine.
North West Frontier Province	Sardar Aurangzeb Khan formed a League ministry in May 1943, in the province that had voted Congress in 1937.
Assam	A League led ministry under Sir Muhammad Saadulla for much of the period.
Punjab	Remained under the Unionists, but Sikandar Hyat Khan's death in December 1942 removed the one leader capable of holding the cross community coalition together. The Unionist collapse follows.

By 1945 the League had what it had entirely lacked in 1937: government office, a mass membership, a fund raising machine, a network of local committees, and above all the ability to say that it, and not the Congress, was the party that had been working while the other side sat in jail.

VERDICT**TRUE THAT THE WAR MADE THE LEAGUE**

The transformation from 4.4 percent in 1937 to a sweep of the Muslim seats in 1946 did not happen because Indian Muslims suddenly rediscovered an ancient identity. It happened in a specific window, between August 1942 and June 1945, when one party was in prison and the other was in office.

The Congress made that window itself. That is not a defence of Jinnah, who exploited it with great skill, and it is not an accusation of treason against him, because refusing to join a rebellion is not treason. It is simply the mechanism, and it is the answer to the question Part 4 left open.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Hindu Mahasabha and the Coalition Governments

This chapter contains facts that many people find surprising, and they are not in dispute among historians. They come from assembly records and from the Mahasabha's own published presidential addresses.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"While the Congress was in jail for the Quit India Movement, the Hindu Mahasabha under Savarkar was in coalition governments with the Muslim League, in the very provinces where the League was demanding Pakistan."

The record

Savarkar was president of the Hindu Mahasabha from 1937 to 1943. During his presidency:

- **Bengal.** In December 1941 the Mahasabha entered A. K. Fazlul Huq's Progressive Coalition ministry. **Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a leading Mahasabha figure, became Finance Minister.** Fazlul Huq was the man who had moved the Lahore Resolution in March 1940.
- **Sindh.** The Mahasabha was part of the provincial government. On 3 March 1943 the Sindh Legislative Assembly passed a resolution moved by G. M. Syed recommending to the Viceroy that the Muslims of India constituted a separate nation. Mahasabha ministers voted against the resolution and remained in the government afterwards.
- **North West Frontier Province.** The Mahasabha was in coalition arrangements involving the Muslim League.

What Savarkar said about it

He did not deny it. He defended it, in public, in his presidential address at the Kanpur session of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1942, arguing that practical politics required reasonable compromises, that the Sindh Hindu Sabha had rightly taken responsibility by joining hands with the League in running a coalition government, and that the Bengal coalition had functioned successfully.

The Mahasabha's declared policy towards the British during the war was **responsive cooperation**: not opposition, but conditional support in exchange for concessions.

The strongest defence, which must be stated

- **Coalitions are how legislatures work.** In a hung assembly, parties that despise each other form governments. That is normal politics, not betrayal, and the Mahasabha ministers voted against the separate nation resolution when it came.

- **The Mahasabha's argument was that Hindu interests needed defending from inside government,** not from a prison cell, and that abandoning office to the League entirely would have made things worse for Hindus in Muslim majority provinces.
- **And Syama Prasad Mookerjee resigned.** This matters and is often left out by the Mahasabha's critics. In November 1942 he resigned from the Bengal ministry, writing to the Governor in protest at the repression of the Quit India movement and at the government's conduct in Midnapore. His resignation letter is a real document and it is a creditable one.

VERDICT ON THE MAHASABHA COALITIONS

TRUE AND DOCUMENTED

The Hindu Mahasabha under Savarkar's presidency shared power with the Muslim League in Bengal, Sindh and the North West Frontier Province during the period when the Congress leadership was in prison. Savarkar publicly defended this in his Kanpur address of 1942.

What it does not prove: that the Mahasabha supported Pakistan. It opposed Partition to the end, and its ministers voted against the Sindh resolution.

What it does establish: that in 1942, when the Congress chose imprisonment, the Mahasabha chose office, and it chose office alongside the party demanding Pakistan. Anyone who uses "they were in coalition with the League" as an accusation against one organisation and not the other is not applying a standard, they are choosing a side.

CHAPTER SIX

Was the RSS Working for the British?

This is the specific charge I was asked to test, and it deserves to be tested precisely rather than shouted about. Precision here means separating two different accusations that are constantly mixed together.

THE CLAIM, AT ITS STRONGEST

"The RSS was a British collaborator. It stayed out of every phase of the freedom struggle, it told its members not to join Quit India, it was never banned while the Congress was outlawed, and British officials recorded their satisfaction with its conduct. It sat out India's freedom struggle and was rewarded for it."

First, separate the two accusations

Accusation A: the RSS did not participate in the freedom struggle at its decisive moment.

Accusation B: the RSS worked for the British, meaning it assisted them, informed for them or acted on their behalf.

These require completely different evidence. Let us take them in turn.

Accusation A: the evidence

- **Golwalkar's own instruction.** In 1942 Golwalkar directed that the organisation would not take part in the Quit India movement. His stated reasoning was explicit: their pledge spoke of the freedom of the country through the defence of religion and culture, and contained no mention of the departure of the British from here.
- **Golwalkar's later admission.** He acknowledged that the Sangh had resolved not to do anything directly during the 1942 movement.
- **It was not banned.** The Congress was declared unlawful in August 1942 and its funds were seized. The RSS was not banned during the war and continued to operate, hold camps and expand.
- **Official approval on the record.** Provincial government assessments of the period recorded that the Sangh had kept itself within the law and had refrained from taking part in the disturbances of August 1942.
- **No leadership arrests.** No senior RSS figure was imprisoned as part of the 1942 movement, in a period when the entire Congress leadership was.

Accusation A is **established**. It is established from the organisation's own leader's words, which is the strongest kind of evidence there is.

Accusation B: the evidence

Now the more serious charge, and here the picture changes.

- **British intelligence did not find the RSS working for them.** Intelligence assessments of the period record that no evidence connected the Sangh as an organisation to the 1942 uprising. They do not record it assisting the government, informing on nationalists or acting under direction. If a body had been working for the British, the British files would be the place it appeared, and it does not appear there.
- **The police also recorded anti British speeches** made at RSS training camps in the same period, which is not the profile of a collaborating organisation.
- **Individual members did participate.** There are documented instances of individual swayam-sevaks joining the 1942 movement in their personal capacity, and of local units sheltering underground workers.
- **The founder's own record.** Hedgewar had been a Congress volunteer, was jailed for a year in 1921 during Non Cooperation, and was jailed again in 1930 during the Civil Disobedience Movement, having first handed over the running of the organisation so that the Sangh itself was not implicated. That is the pattern of a man keeping his organisation out of politics while going himself, which is exactly the doctrine at issue.
- **The stated doctrine was consistent.** The RSS position was that it was a character building and cultural body rather than a political one, and that it therefore abstained from all political agitation. It applied that rule across the board, not selectively in Britain's favour.

VERDICT ON "THE RSS WAS WORKING FOR THE BRITISH"

ONE HALF ESTABLISHED, THE OTHER HALF NOT PROVEN

TRUE, and from the leader's own mouth, that the RSS as an organisation stayed out of the Quit India movement by instruction, that this was justified on the ground that its pledge did not concern the departure of the British, that it was not banned while the Congress was, and that official assessments recorded its conduct approvingly.

NOT PROVEN, and I found no evidence for it, that the RSS worked for the British in the sense of assisting, informing or acting on their behalf. That is a much graver charge and it requires documents that nobody has produced. British intelligence files, which would be the natural place for such a relationship to surface, do not show it.

The honest formulation: abstention, not collaboration. Whether abstention at the decisive moment of a national struggle is a defensible political choice is a real argument and readers will differ. But it is a different argument from treason, and running the two together is exactly the kind of sloppiness this book exists to correct.

THE SAME STANDARD, APPLIED EVERYWHERE

Since I have applied this test to one organisation, here is the same test applied to the others in the same three years, so you can see the whole board at once.

Congress: launched a mass uprising, entire leadership jailed for nearly three years, over 90,000 arrested, roughly a thousand killed by official count.

Muslim League: did not join the uprising, did not obstruct the war, took office in four provinces, grew from a fringe party into a mass movement.

Hindu Mahasabha: did not join the uprising as an organisation, followed a policy of responsive cooperation, held office in coalition with the Muslim League in three provinces. One of its leaders resigned in protest at the repression.

RSS: did not join the uprising by leadership instruction, was not banned, took no office, some individual members participated.

Only one of those four organisations went to prison in 1942. That is the fact, and every claim made today about who freed India has to start from it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Savarkar: The Recruitment Drive and the Petitions

Two separate charges, thirty years apart, about the same man. I am going to deal with them in the order they happened, and I am going to start with what he actually did before either of them.

What is not in dispute

Being fair means beginning here. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was a genuine revolutionary long before he was a political theorist. He founded Abhinav Bharat as a secret society. He wrote *The Indian War of Independence 1857* in 1909, a book banned before it was published, which reframed 1857 as a national war and inspired a generation. He was involved in supplying pistols to India from London. In 1910 he made a famous escape attempt at Marseilles, swimming ashore through a porthole, which became an international legal case.

He was sentenced to two life terms, fifty years, and sent to the Cellular Jail at Port Blair, where he spent roughly a decade under conditions that broke men: the oil mill, solitary confinement, floggings, and no news of the outside world. Nobody should discuss what he wrote from there without holding that in mind.

The mercy petitions

Savarkar submitted a series of petitions to the British authorities from the Andamans. Historians count at least six, in 1911, 1913, 1914, 1917, 1918 and 1920. The texts are in the National Archives of India and have been published in full.

The 1913 petition, presented in person to Sir Reginald Craddock, the Home Member of the Viceroy's Council, during his visit to the Andamans, contains the passage that is quoted most often. I am printing it as written.

"I am ready to serve the Government in any capacity they like, for as my conversion is conscientious so I hope my future conduct would be. By keeping me in jail nothing can be got in comparison to what would be otherwise... Where else can the prodigal son return but to the parental doors of the Government?"

V. D. Savarkar, petition of 14 November 1913, National Archives of India

He was released in 1924 on conditions: he would live in Ratnagiri district and would not participate in politics for five years. He observed those conditions. The restrictions were fully lifted only in 1937.

The defence, at its strongest

- **It was a tactic.** His defenders argue that a revolutionary buried alive in the Andamans is of no use to anybody, that petitioning was the only legal instrument available, and that he wrote whatever was necessary to get out and resume the fight. Getting out of prison by deceiving the enemy is not dishonourable.

- **Petitioning was normal.** Mercy petitions were filed by very many political prisoners of the period, and the practice was not in itself regarded as shameful.
- **He had already served roughly a decade** of an effectively impossible sentence in conditions designed to destroy people.

The problems with that defence

- **The language goes well beyond a request for release.** Offering to serve the Government in any capacity they like, and describing a conscientious conversion, is not the minimum required to obtain clemency.
- **He kept the conditions.** If the petitions were a ruse to get out and fight, the natural sequel is to get out and fight. He did not. He stayed within his restrictions for thirteen years, and when he re entered politics in 1937 it was as the leader of a party pursuing responsive cooperation with the British rather than confrontation.
- **A claim about Gandhi's advice does not hold.** It is sometimes said that Savarkar petitioned on Gandhi's advice. Gandhi did write in 1920 supporting the release of the Savarkar brothers, and he did advise the family on making representations, but this is not the same as having prompted the petitions, several of which predate it. Fact checking of this specific claim has found it to be a distortion of the sequence.

VERDICT ON THE MERCY PETITIONS

THE DOCUMENTS ARE REAL. THE INTERPRETATION IS THE ARGUMENT.

TRUE that Savarkar submitted at least six petitions between 1911 and 1920, and that the 1913 petition contains the words quoted above. They are in the National Archives and anyone can read them.

ALSO TRUE that he had served about a decade in one of the harshest prisons in the empire, and that the tactical defence is not absurd.

What settles it, as far as anything does: a tactic is judged by what follows it. He accepted political restrictions on release and kept them for thirteen years. That is a fact about conduct rather than about words, and it makes the tactical reading harder to sustain.

The recruitment drive

From 1941 to 1943, as Mahasabha president, Savarkar ran a campaign urging Hindus to enlist in the British Indian armed forces. His slogan of the period was to Hinduise all politics and militarise Hindudom. His stated reasoning was that Hindus had been systematically excluded from the military under British recruitment policy, as Part 1 described, and that a war which required manpower was the one opportunity in a century to get a generation of Hindus trained, armed and experienced.

The case that this was collaboration

He was recruiting soldiers for the British Empire during a war, at the exact moment when the Congress leadership was in prison for demanding that the British leave. Congress condemned recruitment. Every soldier recruited was a soldier available to suppress the 1942 movement.

The case for the defence, and it is stronger than most people expect

The best witness for the defence is not a Mahasabha supporter. It is Subhas Chandra Bose, who was at that moment leading an army against the British. In the Azad Hind Radio broadcast of 25 June 1944 which I quoted in Part 5, Bose said that while almost all Congress leaders were decrying Indian soldiers as mercenaries, it was heartening that Savarkar was fearlessly urging Indian youth to enlist, because those enlisted youths themselves provided trained men and soldiers for his Indian National Army.

And Bose was factually correct. The INA was built almost entirely from Indian soldiers of the British Indian Army captured at Singapore. The recruitment pipeline that Savarkar was feeding did in fact end up supplying Bose's army. That is not a retrospective rationalisation. It is what Bose himself said at the time.

VERDICT ON THE RECRUITMENT DRIVE

TRUE THAT HE DID IT. "COLLABORATION" IS TOO SIMPLE A WORD FOR IT.

TRUE that Savarkar campaigned for Hindu enlistment in the British forces during the war while the Congress was in jail, and that this served the British war effort in the short term.

ALSO TRUE that his stated aim was the militarisation of a population that British policy had deliberately disarmed, and that the leader of the armed struggle against the British publicly agreed that the policy was useful to him.

The honest reading: two different theories of how a disarmed people acquires power. Gandhi's answer was moral pressure, Bose's was an army raised abroad, and Savarkar's was to get inside the enemy's army and take the training. All three are coherent. Only one of them involved being in prison in 1942, and that is the fact that decides how each is remembered.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bengal, 1943

While all of this was being argued about, between one and three million people starved to death in one province of India. It is the largest single atrocity in this entire book and it gets the least attention.

What happened

A chain of events, each of which made the next one worse:

- **Burma fell in 1942.** Burma had supplied around fifteen percent of Bengal's rice. That supply stopped.
- **The denial policy.** Fearing a Japanese landing, the government removed or destroyed things the invader might use in coastal Bengal. This included confiscating or sinking tens of thousands of country boats, which were how rice, fish and people moved in the delta, and removing rice stocks from coastal districts. It wrecked the local economy of exactly the region that would starve.
- **Provincial trade barriers.** Other Indian provinces, run by Indians, blocked rice exports to Bengal to protect their own supplies. This is not a British decision and it should not be blamed on the British.
- **Priority for the war.** Food and transport were directed to the army, to war industries and to Calcutta's workers. The rural poor were last in the queue.
- **Prices and hoarding.** Rice prices rose several fold. The landless labourer, the fisherman and the artisan could no longer buy food that physically existed in the market. This is the mechanism Amartya Sen later analysed: people died not because there was no food but because they had lost the ability to command it.
- **Denial that it was a famine.** The government did not formally declare a famine, which would have triggered legal obligations under the Famine Codes.

The numbers

Estimates range from about 800,000 to 3.8 million. The figures most commonly used by historians fall between **2.1 and 3 million** dead. The wide range exists because rural registration collapsed and because deaths from starvation, from the diseases that follow starvation, and from the 1942 cyclone are hard to separate.

Churchill

The charge. Churchill's war cabinet repeatedly refused or reduced requests to divert shipping to carry grain to India, while grain was being stockpiled elsewhere. Offers of aid from Canada and the United States were not taken up in the way they could have been. And the record of Churchill's own remarks about Indians in this period, preserved in the diary of Leo Amery, his own Secretary of State for India, is genuinely shocking, including Amery's note that on this subject he could see no difference between Churchill's outlook and Hitler's.

The defence. 1943 was the height of the shipping crisis. U boats were sinking Allied vessels at a rate that threatened Britain's own survival, and every hull diverted to the Indian Ocean was a hull not carrying an invasion. The Indian provincial governments, which were Indian, failed to control hoarding and blocked interprovincial trade. Some relief was eventually sent, and Wavell on becoming Viceroy in October 1943 used the army to distribute food and brought the famine under control within months, which suggests it could have been done earlier.

VERDICT ON THE BENGAL FAMINE

BRITISH POLICY WAS A MAJOR CAUSE. IT WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE.

TRUE that the denial policy, the wartime priority system, the refusal to declare a famine and the refusal to divert shipping were decisions taken by the British government and administration, and that they turned a shortage into a catastrophe.

ALSO TRUE that Indian provincial governments blocked grain movement to Bengal, that Bengal's own government failed, and that the shipping crisis was real rather than invented.

STILL DEBATED: whether the correct word is genocide. Historians who use it point to intent visible in the recorded attitudes. Historians who reject it point to the absence of a policy of extermination and to the genuine constraints of 1943. I do not think the evidence supports the word genocide and I do think it supports mass death caused by deliberate policy choices in which the lives of Indians were weighed and found less important. Readers may weigh that differently.

Why it belongs in this book: after 1943, the argument that British rule was a benevolent trusteeship was finished, including among Indians who had believed it. And a starving Bengal in 1943 is the same Bengal that will burn in 1946. Part 8 begins there.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

Six years of war ended with an India completely rearranged.

- **The Congress** had spent nearly three years in prison, had run the largest uprising since 1857 and had seen it crushed, and emerged in June 1945 with enormous moral standing and almost no organisation left in the Muslim majority provinces.
- **The Muslim League** had gone from four percent of the Muslim vote to four provincial governments, a mass membership and a written British assurance that nothing could be settled over its head.
- **The Hindu Mahasabha** had held office in coalition with the League in three provinces and had defended the policy publicly.
- **The RSS** had stayed out by instruction, remained unbanned and grown quietly.
- **Bose's army** had been destroyed in Burma, and was about to become far more dangerous to the British dead than it had been alive.
- **And Britain** had won the war and lost the argument, with a bankrupt treasury, an Indian Army it could no longer be sure of, and a famine on its conscience.

In Part 7 we take the biggest claim in this whole subject and test it properly with numbers: that India became free because Britain was broke and exhausted, and that Gandhi's contribution was minimal. We will look at what Britain actually owed India, what British officials wrote to each other in private, whether that famous Attlee quotation is real, and how the credit should honestly be divided.

Timeline for Part 6

DATE	EVENT
3 September 1939	Linlithgow declares India at war without consulting Indians.
October to November 1939	Congress ministries resign in all eight provinces.
22 December 1939	Muslim League observes Day of Deliverance.
23 March 1940	Lahore Resolution.
August 1940	August Offer. Britain states power will not be transferred over the objection of large elements, giving the League an effective veto.
October 1940	Individual satyagraha begins. Vinoba Bhave first, Nehru second.
December 1941	Hindu Mahasabha joins the Fazlul Huq coalition in Bengal. Syama Prasad Mookerjee becomes Finance Minister.

DATE	EVENT
15 February 1942	Singapore falls. Indian prisoners of war become the basis of the INA.
March 1942	Cripps Mission. Offer rejected by Congress and by the League.
8 August 1942	Quit India resolution at Gowalia Tank. Gandhi's do or die speech.
9 August 1942	Entire Congress leadership arrested before dawn. Congress declared unlawful.
August to October 1942	Leaderless uprising. Parallel governments at Satara, Tamluk, Ballia and Talcher. Over 90,000 arrested.
1942	Golwalkar directs that the RSS will not take part in the Quit India movement.
1942	Savarkar's Kanpur presidential address defends coalitions with the Muslim League and responsive cooperation.
November 1942	Syama Prasad Mookerjee resigns from the Bengal ministry over the repression in Midnapore.
December 1942	Sikandar Hyat Khan dies. The Punjab Unionist coalition begins to unravel.
3 March 1943	Sindh Assembly passes the separate nation resolution. Mahasabha ministers vote against and remain in government.
April to May 1943	Muslim League ministries formed in Bengal under Nazimuddin and in the North West Frontier Province under Aurangzeb Khan.
1943	The Bengal famine. Estimates of 2.1 to 3 million dead.
October 1943	Wavell replaces Linlithgow as Viceroy and uses the army for food distribution.
1941 to 1943	Savarkar's recruitment campaign for the British Indian armed forces.
June 1945	Congress leaders released. Simla Conference.

Word list

Dominion status	Self government within the British Commonwealth, with the Crown as head of state, as Canada and Australia had.
Non accession clause	The provision in the Cripps offer allowing any province to stay out of the Indian union. The first official British concession of the principle of partition.
Individual satyagraha	The controlled protest campaign from October 1940 in which selected individuals made anti war speeches and courted arrest.
Parallel government	A local administration set up by Quit India rebels in place of the British one, as at Satara and Tamluk.

Prati Sarkar	The parallel government at Satara in Maharashtra under Nana Patil, which functioned into 1945.
Responsive cooperation	The Hindu Mahasabha's declared wartime policy of conditional cooperation with the British rather than opposition.
Denial policy	The wartime removal or destruction of boats and rice stocks in coastal Bengal to deny them to a possible Japanese invasion.
Famine Codes	The rules requiring government relief once a famine was formally declared. A famine was not declared in Bengal in 1943.
Swayamsevak	A volunteer member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.
Cellular Jail	The prison at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands used for political prisoners transported for life.

Sources used in Part 6

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COMING NEXT

Part 7: Did the War Give Us Freedom? The biggest claim in this whole subject, tested with numbers. How broke Britain actually was in 1945, and exactly what it owed India. The Royal Indian Navy mutiny of February 1946 and the INA trials. What Wavell and the British Cabinet wrote to each other in private about why they were leaving. Whether the famous Attlee quotation about Gandhi's contribution being minimal is real and where it comes from. And an honest division of the credit between the mass movements, the revolutionaries, the army, the war and the world.

Part 6 of a twelve part series. Researched, written and compiled by Lovepreet Singh.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART SEVEN OF TWELVE

Did the War Give Us Freedom?

*The biggest claim of all, tested with the money, the army,
the private British papers and one very famous quotation*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the part I most wanted to write, and it is the reason I started this project at all.

The sentence I kept hearing was: "The British left because they went broke after the war. Gandhi had nothing to do with it." It is said with total confidence, usually by someone who then produces a quotation from a British Prime Minister as proof.

So I went to find out. I looked at what Britain actually owed, what it actually owed India specifically, what its own officials wrote to each other in private, what happened to the Indian armed forces in 1945 and 1946, and what happened to other European empires that were equally broke at exactly the same time.

The answer is more interesting than either side's version. The claim is **substantially right about the war and substantially wrong about the conclusion it draws**. And the famous quotation used to clinch it turns out to have a problem that I think every Indian should know about.

One promise about this part in particular. I have tried to argue from documents and numbers rather than from feeling. Where I give a figure, it comes from a source I have named. Where historians disagree about a figure, I have given the range instead of picking the one that helps my case. And in the last chapter I have set out my own division of the credit, clearly marked as my judgement rather than as a fact, so that you can disagree with it precisely.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART SEVEN

CHAPTER 1	The claim, stated at its strongest
CHAPTER 2	The money: how broke was Britain?
CHAPTER 3	The army: the thing that actually decided it
CHAPTER 4	What the British said to each other in private
CHAPTER 5	The machine that stopped working
CHAPTER 6	The Attlee quotation, tested
CHAPTER 7	Why 1947 and not 1930 or 1960?
CHAPTER 8	What happened to the other empires
CHAPTER 9	The honest division of the credit
CLOSING	Timeline, word list, sources, what comes next

CHAPTER ONE

The Claim, Stated at Its Strongest

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"India did not win freedom. Britain gave it up. By 1945 Britain was bankrupt, exhausted, and could no longer afford an empire. A Labour government came in that did not want India anyway. The British simply handed over the keys and went home. Gandhi's spinning wheel and prayer meetings had nothing to do with it. Even the British Prime Minister who signed the papers said afterwards that Gandhi's contribution was minimal, and that what really frightened them was Bose's army and the naval mutiny. The whole story of the nonviolent freedom struggle is a myth invented by the Congress to justify ruling India."

That is the claim in its strongest form and I have not softened it. It contains several separate assertions, and the reason arguments about it never end is that people treat them as one thing when they are five.

1. Britain was financially broken by the war. *Testable with numbers.*
2. Britain could no longer rely on the forces that held India. *Testable with events.*
3. The British left for those reasons and said so privately. *Testable with their own documents.*
4. A British Prime Minister confirmed that Gandhi was irrelevant. *Testable as a quotation.*
5. Therefore the Indian mass movement contributed little. *This is a conclusion, not a fact, and it is where the argument actually goes wrong.*

I will take them in that order, and then add two tests that the claim never applies to itself: why the British left in 1947 rather than in some other year, and what happened to the other European empires that were equally broke at the same moment.

CHAPTER TWO

The Money: How Broke Was Britain?

Very. This part of the claim is true, and it is more dramatic than most people realise.

The great reversal

Britain entered the Second World War as the largest creditor nation in the world and came out of it as the largest debtor nation in the world. Its external sterling liabilities stood at roughly **£3.4 billion** by 1945. National wealth had been consumed, overseas assets sold, and the merchant fleet devastated.

Then two more blows landed.

- **Lend Lease was cancelled abruptly** by the United States in August 1945, days after the Japanese surrender, leaving Britain with no means of paying for imports.
- **The Anglo American loan of December 1945**, about 3.75 billion dollars, came with a condition: sterling would have to be made convertible. When Britain complied in July 1947, there was a run on the pound within weeks and convertibility had to be suspended. That crisis happened in the very weeks when India was becoming independent.

And the winter of 1946 to 1947 was the coldest in living memory, with coal shortages, power cuts and factories closed. Britain in 1947 was a country that could not heat its own homes.

The part that matters most: Britain owed India

This is the fact that turns the whole imperial relationship upside down, and it is not widely known in India.

During the war, India supplied Britain with food, textiles, materials and above all soldiers, on an enormous scale. Britain could not pay in real money, because sterling had been made inconvertible in 1939. So the debts piled up as credits held in London, called **sterling balances**.

FIGURE	DETAIL
India's sterling balances by the end of 1945	About £1,138 million , roughly 35.8 percent of Britain's total external liabilities. Some estimates of the blocked balances run higher, up to about £1.5 billion. India's was by far the largest single holding of any country.
What that meant	The colony was now the creditor and the imperial power was the debtor.
How it was paid for inside India	The Reserve Bank of India printed rupees to fund the purchases. The result was severe wartime inflation borne by ordinary Indians. In real terms Indians had already paid for the debt before it was ever repaid.
The settlement	Under an interim agreement of 14 August 1947, only £35 million was released immediately, with the bulk of about £1,160 million to be released in negotiated instalments over years.

India had stopped being profitable

For most of the imperial period India paid for itself and for a great deal else besides. The Indian Army was financed from Indian revenues and used across Asia and Africa for British purposes. That arrangement was the economic engine of the empire.

During the war it broke. Britain agreed to meet the costs of Indian forces used outside India, so the army that had been an asset became a liability. By 1945 holding India cost money instead of making it. Once that is true, a great deal of the argument for staying disappears, and the Treasury in London knew it.

VERDICT ON THE ECONOMIC PART OF THE CLAIM

TRUE

Britain was financially broken, India's sterling balances were the largest single component of Britain's external debt, and India had stopped being a profitable possession. Anyone who denies this is not arguing with a nationalist narrative, they are arguing with the Bank of England.

But hold on to one question, because Chapter 7 turns on it: being broke explains why an empire cannot afford to expand. It does not automatically explain why it lets go of what it already holds. Broke empires very often fight harder rather than leaving, and we will look at four that did.

CHAPTER THREE

The Army: The Thing That Actually Decided It

If I had to name the single mechanism by which British rule in India ended, it would not be the money. It would be this.

How a few people ruled a subcontinent

At its height, British India was administered by an Indian Civil Service of roughly a thousand covenanted officers, of whom a growing proportion were Indian, and held by an army that was overwhelmingly composed of Indians commanded by British officers. The police were Indian. The clerks were Indian. The soldiers were Indian.

Part 1 explained how carefully the British had rebuilt that army after 1857 so that it could never combine against them. That machine was the foundation of everything. Remove its reliability and the entire structure has nothing to stand on.

During the war it expanded to about **two and a half million men**, the largest volunteer army in history. Then the war ended, and that vast force began to demobilise into a country in political ferment.

1945 and 1946: the instrument fails

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
November 1945 onwards	The INA trials at the Red Fort. As Part 5 described, the British tried three officers, one Hindu, one Muslim and one Sikh, for treason. The trials turned into the largest political mobilisation since 1942, with Congress and the Muslim League on the same side of the defence. Serving Indian soldiers followed the trials closely. The government was forced to commute the sentences.
January 1946	Mutinies and strikes among Royal Air Force personnel in India over demobilisation, which Indian personnel watched with interest.
18 to 23 February 1946	The Royal Indian Navy mutiny. It began at Bombay over food, conditions and racial insult, and became political within a day. It spread to 78 ships and more than twenty shore establishments and involved over 20,000 ratings , reaching Karachi, Madras, Calcutta, Cochin and the Andamans. Ships flew the Congress, League and Communist flags together. Bombay's workers struck in sympathy and the city saw days of street fighting in which over two hundred civilians were killed. The mutiny was called off after three and a half days on appeals from Sardar Patel and from the League.
February and March 1946	A signals strike at Jabalpur, unrest in Indian Army units, and police strikes in Bihar and Delhi.

Why this was the end

Consider the position of the Commander in Chief, Claude Auchinleck, in early 1946. He had to answer a question that had never previously needed asking: if a mass movement began again, would the Indian Army obey an order to fire on it?

His assessment, and that of his commanders, was that the loyalty of Indian officers and men could no longer be assumed, that the INA prosecutions were themselves corroding it, and that a serious confrontation risked breaking the army as an institution. That is why the INA sentences were commuted despite the convictions.

Now put that beside the arithmetic. Suppressing India by force would require British troops. Britain in 1946 was demobilising, could not afford what it had, and had a war weary electorate that had just voted overwhelmingly for a government promising houses and a health service. There were no divisions to send, no money to pay them and no political will to try.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

The British ruled India with Indian soldiers. In 1946 they realised they could no longer be sure those soldiers would shoot Indians for them. Once that is true, everything else is just paper-work.

VERDICT ON THE MILITARY PART OF THE CLAIM

TRUE, AND MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE MONEY

The reliability of the Indian armed forces was the load bearing wall of British rule, and between the INA trials and the naval mutiny it cracked. This part of the claim is not only correct, it is understated in most Indian textbooks.

Note carefully what this proves and does not prove. It proves that Bose and the INA had an enormous effect, mostly after Bose was dead. It does not prove that the mass movement was irrelevant, because the reason Indian sailors and soldiers were politically charged in 1946, and the reason two hundred thousand people came out in Bombay to support them, was twenty five years of mass politics. An army does not become unreliable in a vacuum.

CHAPTER FOUR

What the British Said to Each Other in Private

Rule 5 from Part 1: compare the public words with the private ones. For this period we have an unusually complete private record.

Wavell

Lord Wavell was Viceroy from October 1943 to March 1947 and kept a detailed journal. Its tone across those years is not the tone of a man handing over a gift. It is the tone of a man reporting that a position is no longer tenable.

His recurring themes are consistent and they are worth listing plainly:

- The British administrative machine in India was worn out, understaffed and ageing, with recruitment to the services having effectively stopped.
- Britain lacked the military strength to hold India against a serious civil disturbance, and could not get it.
- Therefore a decision had to be taken and a date fixed, because drifting would end in a collapse rather than a transfer.

In 1946 he prepared what became known as the Breakdown Plan: a scheme for a phased British withdrawal, province by province, if negotiations failed. London found it defeatist and it contributed to his replacement by Mountbatten. But the fact that a serving Viceroy was drafting an evacuation plan in 1946 tells you the real state of British confidence.

The Cabinet

Attlee's government announced on 20 February 1947 that Britain would transfer power by June 1948 and that Mountbatten would replace Wavell. The reasoning inside government, visible in the Cabinet papers, combined three things: the impossibility of holding India by force, the impossibility of financing it, and the fear that without a fixed date the situation would deteriorate into a general breakdown for which Britain would be blamed and in which British lives would be lost.

Mountbatten then moved the date forward to August 1947, which is a subject for Part 8.

What is and is not in the record

Two things are worth stating precisely.

What is not there: any suggestion that Britain was leaving out of goodwill, or because it had been persuaded by the moral force of nonviolence, or because it had decided India was ready. The sentimental version of the story is not supported by the British papers at all.

What is there, constantly: anxiety about mass movements, about the reliability of Indian forces, about the administrative machine, about world opinion, and about the cost. In other words, the

British record supports the hard headed reading of why they left. It also, on every page, treats the Congress as the fact that has to be dealt with, which is not how you write about an irrelevance.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Machine That Stopped Working

This is the factor nobody argues about because nobody mentions it. An empire is not held by soldiers alone. It is held by clerks, magistrates and district officers, and by 1946 there were not enough of them left.

How thin it always was

The Indian Civil Service, the steel frame of British India, never exceeded about twelve hundred officers at any time. Roughly a thousand men, spread across a subcontinent of nearly four hundred million people, ran the districts, sat as magistrates, collected the revenue and were the government as far as most Indians ever saw it.

It worked because it was accepted, and because below it sat a vast Indian structure of deputy collectors, clerks, constables and village officials who did the actual work. The moment either the acceptance or the Indian layer beneath became unreliable, the frame had nothing to hold up.

What the war did to it

- **Recruitment stopped.** The London examinations for the Indian Civil Service were suspended after the 1939 intake. The last competitive examination was held in January 1943, and its successful candidates joined in October 1944. For most of the decisive decade, the service was not replacing itself.
- **The remaining officers aged and thinned.** Men worked through the war without leave, in a service with no new entrants, running famine relief, war supply and then the suppression of a national uprising.
- **The service was now roughly half Indian.** At Partition the cadre stood at about 980 officers, of whom around 468 were European and over 500 were Indian. Think about what that means for a government intending to hold India against its own population. Half your district officers belong to the population you would be holding it against.
- **The subordinate services were breaking.** Police strikes in Bihar and Delhi in 1946, the signals strike at Jabalpur, and widespread indiscipline in the lower ranks meant the layer that actually enforced the state's will was itself in dispute with it.

Why this settles the argument about coercion

People debate whether Britain could have held India by force in 1946. The debate usually gets conducted in terms of troops and money. But suppose Britain had found the divisions and the funds. Who would have issued the orders in the districts, sat as the magistrate, signed the detention papers and led the police party?

The answer, in more than half the cases, would have been an Indian officer of the Indian Civil Service, with a family, a community and a future in an independent India that everyone could

now see coming. Wavell's journal returns to this repeatedly: the machine was worn out, it was not being replenished, and it could not be asked to do very much more.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

By 1946 the British in India had no money, an army they could not trust, and an administration that was half Indian, exhausted and had not hired anybody for seven years.

You cannot rule a country with an organisation in that condition. Not because it is wrong, but because it will not physically work.

CHAPTER SIX

The Attlee Quotation, Tested

This single quotation does more work in Indian internet argument than any other sentence about the freedom movement. So let us do to it exactly what this book was created to do.

THE QUOTATION AS IT CIRCULATES

That in 1956 the former British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, on a visit to Calcutta, told the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court that the real reasons for the British departure were the Indian National Army and the naval mutiny, which had destroyed the loyalty of the Indian armed forces, and that when asked about Gandhi's role, Attlee answered with a slow smile and the word *minimal*.

Where it actually comes from

Trace it back and here is what you find.

The source is a letter written by **Justice Phani Bhusan Chakravartti**, who was indeed Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court from 1952 to 1958, and who was acting Governor of West Bengal at the time of Attlee's visit. The letter was written on **30 March 1976** and sent to the publisher of the historian R. C. Majumdar, and it was printed as an appendix in a Bengali volume of Majumdar's.

The problems, in order of seriousness

1. **It is not Attlee's words. It is one man's memory of a private conversation.** There is no transcript, no note taken at the time, and no other witness. Everything depends on the accuracy of a recollection.
2. **It was written twenty years after the conversation** is said to have taken place, and nine years after Attlee's death, so it could not be put to him.
3. **It appeared in an appendix to a memoir**, not in an archive, not in a contemporaneous letter, and not in any peer reviewed work.
4. **There is no corroboration anywhere.** Attlee wrote memoirs, gave interviews and left papers. He discussed the Indian decision repeatedly. Nothing resembling this appears in any of it.
5. **There is an error in the letter itself.** It refers to Attlee by a title he did not hold at the relevant time, which is the kind of slip that raises questions about a document recalling exact words after two decades.

What can be verified

To be fair to the claim: Attlee did visit India in 1956 and was in Calcutta in October of that year, and Chakravartti did hold the offices described. The setting is real. What cannot be verified is the conversation, and above all the single word on which the whole thing rests.

VERDICT ON THE ATTLEE QUOTATION**NOT VERIFIED. IT SHOULD NOT BE USED AS EVIDENCE.**

It fails Rule 1 of this book. There is no primary source: no transcript, no contemporaneous note, no corroboration in the papers of a man who left extensive papers. It is a recollection recorded twenty years later, after the death of the person quoted, in an appendix to a memoir.

And now the important part, which people on both sides get wrong.

Discarding this quotation does **not** weaken the argument about the INA and the naval mutiny. That argument stands on far better evidence: the actual mutiny of 20,000 ratings on 78 ships, the commutation of the INA sentences, and the assessments of the Commander in Chief. Chapter 3 established it without needing Attlee at all.

Equally, discarding it does not prove that Gandhi's contribution was large. That has to be argued on its own evidence, which is what Chapter 9 does.

The lesson is the one this book keeps repeating: a true argument can be defended with a false document, and when the document collapses it takes the credibility of the argument with it. If your case is good, do not attach it to a quotation you cannot source.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Why 1947 and Not 1930 or 1960?

Here is the test that the economic explanation never applies to itself, and it is the one that breaks it.

Britain had been broke before

If poverty alone produces withdrawal, then Britain should have left India in the early 1930s. It was in the middle of the Great Depression, it abandoned the gold standard in 1931, unemployment was around three million, and it faced a civil disobedience movement that put tens of thousands in jail.

What did it do? It arrested Gandhi, banned the Congress, ruled by ordinance, and then wrote the Government of India Act of 1935, a constitution designed to keep ultimate power in British hands for another generation. Being broke produced repression and a delaying constitution, not departure.

And other empires were just as broke in 1945

This is the decisive comparison, and it is why I think the pure economics argument fails.

In 1945 France was not merely broke, it had been occupied and physically wrecked. The Netherlands had been occupied and stripped. Both were far worse off than Britain.

EMPIRE	CONDITION IN 1945	WHAT IT DID
Netherlands in Indonesia	Occupied, ruined, dependent on American aid	Fought a colonial war from 1945 to 1949, sending over 100,000 troops, before conceding independence.
France in Indochina	Occupied, bankrupt, politically shattered	Fought from 1946 to 1954 and lost at Dien Bien Phu. Hundreds of thousands dead.
France in Algeria	Still recovering	Fought from 1954 to 1962, a war that killed hundreds of thousands and destroyed the Fourth Republic.
Portugal in Africa	Europe's poorest country	Held on until 1974 and fought three simultaneous colonial wars for thirteen years.
Britain in Kenya and Malaya	The same bankrupt Britain	Fought a counterinsurgency in Malaya from 1948 to 1960 and suppressed the Mau Mau in Kenya through the 1950s with mass detention. Kenya became independent in 1963.

Read that table again, because it settles something. Bankrupt empires do not automatically go home. Frequently they fight, for years, at ruinous cost, including the very same bankrupt Britain in other colonies at the very same time.

So what was different about India?

Four things, and they have to be taken together.

1. **The instrument of coercion was Indian and had become unreliable.** France in Indochina could send French troops. Britain could not send British troops to India in any useful number, and the Indian Army was the very thing in question. This is Chapter 3.
2. **There was an organised alternative government waiting.** This is the contribution that gets least credit and deserves most. By 1945 the Congress was a mass party with a structure in every district, an experienced leadership that had actually run eight provincial governments, and a claim to legitimacy that nobody could deny. When the British decided to go, there was somebody to hand power to, and a machine capable of receiving it. In Indonesia, Indochina and Algeria there was no such body, so decolonisation had to be fought out.
3. **British rule in India had already lost its argument.** Twenty five years of mass movements had made the moral case for the Raj unsustainable in Britain itself, in the United States and, decisively, among British administrators. When your own district officers no longer believe the justification for their presence, the machine stops working long before the money runs out.
4. **The political conditions in Britain had changed.** Labour won a landslide in July 1945. The party had a long standing commitment to Indian self government, Attlee had served on the Simon Commission and knew the subject, and the electorate wanted housing and health rather than colonial garrisons.

VERDICT ON "WE GOT FREEDOM ONLY BECAUSE BRITAIN WAS BROKE"

HALF TRUE, AND THE MISSING HALF IS THE WHOLE POINT

TRUE that Britain was bankrupt, that India had become a cost rather than a source of profit, and that the war was the immediate trigger for the timing.

FALSE that bankruptcy alone explains a withdrawal, because four other equally bankrupt empires, including Britain in other colonies, chose to fight instead, some of them for decades.

The accurate statement: the war made British rule unaffordable and the army unreliable. The mass movement made it illegitimate and, crucially, provided the alternative government that made a peaceful handover possible instead of a fifteen year colonial war. Neither factor alone produces August 1947.

CHAPTER EIGHT

What Happened to the Other Empires

A short chapter, because the table does the arguing.

TERRITORY	INDEPEND- ENT	AT WHAT COST
India and Pakistan	August 1947	No anti colonial war. The catastrophe was Partition violence between Indians, which is Part 8.
Burma	January 1948	Negotiated, following the Aung San Attlee agreement.
Ceylon	February 1948	Negotiated and peaceful.
Indonesia	December 1949	Four years of war against the Dutch.
Vietnam	1954	Eight years of war against France, then a further twenty years of war.
Malaya	1957	Twelve years of counterinsurgency.
Ghana	1957	Negotiated after mass agitation.
Algeria	1962	Eight years of war, hundreds of thousands dead.
Kenya	1963	Mau Mau insurgency and mass detention through the 1950s.
Angola and Mozambique	1975	Thirteen years of war against Portugal.

Two observations.

First, India went early. It was among the first major territories out, and its example accelerated everything that followed. Ghana's Nkrumah, Kenya's Kenyatta and the American civil rights movement all borrowed directly from the Indian method, and said so.

Second, India went without an anti colonial war. That is extraordinarily rare and it is the single strongest piece of evidence for the value of what Gandhi built. It should be said in the same breath that India then suffered a horror of a different kind in 1947, but that horror was inflicted by Indians on Indians, and the argument about whose fault it was is Part 8.

CHAPTER NINE

The Honest Division of the Credit

Here is my own judgement, clearly labelled as judgement. The facts in the previous chapters are not mine to shape. This chapter is an argument, and you are entitled to weigh it differently.

The five factors

FACTOR	WHAT IT ACTUALLY DID	MY WEIGHTING
The Second World War and the economic collapse	Removed Britain's ability to pay for India, turned the colony from an asset into a liability, destroyed the imperial system worldwide, and set the timing.	The largest single factor in <i>when</i> , and a major factor in <i>whether</i> .
The mass movement from 1920 to 1942	Destroyed the legitimacy of British rule in Indian, British and world opinion. Built a mass organisation capable of taking over the state. Made coercion politically expensive at every step. Politicised the population from which the army and police were drawn.	The largest single factor in <i>whether it could be a handover rather than a war</i> , and a major factor in the timing.
The INA, the trials and the mutinies	Broke the assumption that the Indian armed forces would always obey. This was the immediate mechanism of collapse in 1946.	Decisive at the end, and disproportionately effective for its size. Bose achieved more dead than alive.
The revolutionaries from 1905 to 1935	Kept the security state expensive and afraid, produced the emotional charge that constitutional politics could not, and supplied the martyrs around which mass feeling formed.	Real but indirect. They never came close to seizing power and did not claim they could.
The collapse of the administrative machine	Recruitment suspended from 1939, a service half Indian by 1947, exhausted officers and striking police. Even with troops and money, there was nobody left to govern with.	Underrated. It is the reason coercion was not merely expensive but impossible.
International pressure	American pressure on Britain during and after the war, the new United Nations, and the emerging competition with the Soviet Union for the sympathies of colonised peoples.	Significant, and usually underrated in Indian accounts.

What Gandhi specifically contributed

Since the claim names him, let me answer about him precisely. Four things, none of which is spiritual.

1. **He built the machine.** The four anna membership, the language based provincial committees, the working committee, the village organisation. That machine ran eight provincial govern-

ments in 1937 and formed the government of India in 1947. Without it the British would have had nobody to hand over to and no reason to believe a handover would hold.

2. **He made rule illegitimate rather than merely resented.** Resentment is normal in an empire and does not end one. What ends one is the ruler's own loss of belief in the right to rule, and Dharasana, the salt law and the jails full of unarmed people did that work in London and Washington as well as in India.
3. **He kept it from becoming a war Britain could win.** A violent insurgency in the 1920s or 1930s would have been crushed, as every violent movement in that period was, and it would have justified the Raj's own account of itself. This is the strategic core of Chauri Chaura, which Part 3 examined.
4. **He made the movement mass rather than elite.** The politicisation of ordinary Indians is why the sailors of 1946 had a political vocabulary at all, and why two hundred thousand Bombay workers came out for them.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI DID NOTHING"

FALSE

The claim only looks plausible if you define contribution as forcing a British surrender in a single decisive act. By that definition, nobody contributed anything, because no such act occurred. Not Gandhi, not Bose, not the revolutionaries.

Once you ask the real questions, the answers are clear. Who made British rule morally unsustainable? Who built the organisation that received power? Who made sure that when the moment came there was a government in waiting rather than fifteen years of insurgency? Those are Gandhi's, and they are not small.

And here is the fair concession, which Gandhi's defenders should make openly: the mass movement did not, on its own, drive the British out. Quit India was crushed. Between 1942 and 1945 the Congress achieved nothing at all, because it was in prison. The war and the collapse of the army were what made 1947 happen when it did. Anyone who tells the story as though Gandhi walked to the sea and the empire fell over is telling you a fairy tale, and fairy tales are exactly why the opposite claim has become so popular.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

The claim we started with has come apart into its true and false pieces.

- Britain was broke. **True**, and India was its largest creditor.
- The Indian armed forces had become unreliable. **True**, and this was the decisive mechanism.
- The British said so privately. **True**, and their papers contain no trace of the sentimental version of the story.
- A British Prime Minister confirmed Gandhi was irrelevant. **Not verified**, and the source will not bear the weight placed on it.
- Therefore the mass movement contributed little. **False**, and the evidence is what happened to every empire that faced no such movement.

The war opened the door. The mass movement decided who walked through it, and whether the walk took one year or fifteen and cost a hundred thousand lives or a million.

Which brings us to the terrible irony of this book. India got out of colonial rule without an anti colonial war, and then, in the space of a few months, suffered a catastrophe as bad as most colonial wars, inflicted by Indians on each other.

Part 8 is about how that happened, month by month, from the Cabinet Mission of March 1946 to the Radcliffe Line of August 1947.

Timeline for Part 7

DATE	EVENT
1939	London examinations for the Indian Civil Service suspended. The service stops replacing itself.
1939	Sterling made inconvertible. India's war supplies to Britain begin accumulating as sterling balances.
January 1943	Last competitive examination for the Indian Civil Service.
1943	Bengal famine. British moral authority collapses.
July 1945	Labour wins the British general election. Attlee becomes Prime Minister.
August 1945	Lend Lease cancelled abruptly. Britain has no means of paying for imports.
End of 1945	India's sterling balances stand at about £1,138 million, roughly 35.8 percent of Britain's external liabilities.
November 1945	INA trials begin at the Red Fort.

DATE	EVENT
December 1945	Anglo American loan of about 3.75 billion dollars, conditional on sterling convertibility.
January 1946	Royal Air Force strikes and mutinies in India.
18 to 23 February 1946	Royal Indian Navy mutiny. 78 ships, over twenty shore establishments, more than 20,000 ratings. Over two hundred civilians killed in Bombay street fighting.
March 1946	Cabinet Mission arrives in India. See Part 8.
1946	Wavell prepares the Breakdown Plan for a phased British withdrawal.
Winter 1946 to 1947	The coldest British winter in living memory. Fuel crisis and industrial shutdown.
20 February 1947	Attlee announces transfer of power by June 1948 and the appointment of Mountbatten.
July 1947	Sterling convertibility introduced and suspended within weeks after a run on the pound.
14 August 1947	Interim sterling balances agreement. £35 million released immediately of about £1,160 million owed.

Word list

Sterling balances	Money owed by Britain to countries that had supplied it during the war, held as blocked credits in London because sterling was not convertible. India held the largest amount.
Convertibility	The ability to exchange a currency freely for others, especially for dollars. Britain suspended it in 1939, restored it in July 1947 under American pressure, and suspended it again within weeks.
Lend Lease	The American programme supplying war materials to allies. Cancelled abruptly in August 1945.
Ratings	Naval personnel below officer rank. The Royal Indian Navy mutiny was a mutiny of ratings.
Breakdown Plan	Wavell's 1946 scheme for a phased British evacuation of India if negotiations failed.
Commander in Chief	The head of the armed forces in India. Claude Auchinleck held the post from 1943.
Counterinsurgency	Military and police operations to suppress an armed independence movement, as in Malaya and Kenya.

Indian Civil Service	The senior administrative service of British India, never more than about twelve hundred officers, about half Indian by 1947.
Decolonisation	The process by which European empires gave up or lost their colonies, mainly between 1945 and 1975.

Sources used in Part 7

- Marcelo de Paiva Abreu, "Britain as a debtor: Indian sterling balances, 1940 to 1953", *Economic History Review*, and related scholarship on the sterling balance negotiations.
- Bank of England archive material on wartime finance and the sterling area.
- Interim agreement on sterling balances between the United Kingdom, India and Pakistan, 14 August 1947.
- Records of the Royal Indian Navy mutiny, February 1946, including the ship and personnel figures and the subsequent commission of inquiry.
- Proceedings and outcome of the Indian National Army trials at the Red Fort, November 1945 to 1946, and the commutation of sentences.
- Lord Wavell, *The Viceroy's Journal*, edited by Penderel Moon, for the private assessments of 1944 to 1947 and the Breakdown Plan.
- British Cabinet papers and the *Transfer of Power* document series, 1942 to 1947.
- Clement Attlee's statement to the House of Commons, 20 February 1947.
- Letter of Justice Phani Bhusan Chakravartti, 30 March 1976, as printed in an appendix to a volume by R. C. Majumdar, together with the published examinations of its reliability.
- Records of the Indian Civil Service, including recruitment suspension after 1939, the final examination of January 1943, and the cadre composition at Partition of about 980 officers, roughly 468 European and over 500 Indian.
- Standard histories of decolonisation for the comparative dates and costs in Indonesia, Indochina, Algeria, Malaya, Kenya and the Portuguese territories.

COMING NEXT

Part 8: How Partition Actually Happened. Month by month from March 1946 to August 1947. The Cabinet Mission Plan and whether it offered a united India. Nehru's press conference of July 1946 and whether it destroyed the last chance. Direct Action Day and the killing in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and Rawalpindi. Who agreed to Partition, in what order, and on what date, including what the Congress Working Committee actually voted. Gandhi's real position, and why he did not fast against it. Radcliffe and a border drawn in five weeks. And the numbers: how many died and how many were driven from their homes.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART EIGHT OF TWELVE

How Partition Actually Happened

*Month by month from March 1946 to August 1947:
the last plan, the killings, the votes and the line*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Seven parts have been leading here.

I have tried in this one to do something the popular accounts almost never do, which is to put the events in order and let the order do the arguing. When you read that Partition happened because of one man, or one speech, or one betrayal, what you are usually being given is a single true fact lifted out of a sequence of about twenty. Put the twenty back in and the single fact looks very different.

So this part is deliberately built as a calendar. Seventeen months, in order, with dates. You will see the last serious plan for a united India, and you will see it accepted by both sides and then destroyed. You will see the killing begin, and you will see how each massacre made the next one certain. You will see exactly who agreed to Partition and on what date, in an order that surprises most people. And you will see a border drawn in five weeks by a man who had never been to India, published two days after the countries it divided already existed.

This is also the part with the most dead people in it. I have given the casualty figures as ranges, because the ranges are wide and honest history does not pick the number that suits the argument. Behind every one of those ranges are families whose descendants are still here, including mine, and I have tried to write about them with the seriousness they are owed.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART EIGHT

CHAPTER 1	1946: the election that changed everything
CHAPTER 2	The Cabinet Mission: the last plan for a united India
CHAPTER 3	10 July 1946: did Nehru destroy it?
CHAPTER 4	The killing begins
CHAPTER 5	A government that could not govern
CHAPTER 6	Who agreed to Partition, and when
CHAPTER 7	Gandhi: over my dead body?
CHAPTER 8	Radcliffe: a border in five weeks
CHAPTER 9	The numbers
CHAPTER 10	The fifty five crore fast
CLOSING	Timeline, word list, sources, what comes next

CHAPTER ONE

1946: The Election That Changed Everything

In Part 4 the Muslim League had 4.4 percent of the Muslim vote. Here is what happened when Indians voted again, nine years later.

The Simla Conference, June and July 1945

The Congress leaders came out of jail in June 1945 to find the political ground completely changed. Wavell called a conference at Simla to form a new Executive Council with equal Hindu and Muslim representation.

It failed on one point. Jinnah insisted that *only* the Muslim League could nominate the Muslim members. The Congress, which had Muslim members including its own former president Maulana Azad, could not accept that it was a Hindu body. Wavell abandoned the conference rather than proceed over Jinnah's objection, which was itself an enormous concession, and confirmed the veto that Part 6 described.

The elections of 1945 and 1946

Elections were held for the central and provincial legislatures over the winter. The results were unambiguous, and they were the mirror image of 1937.

RESULT	FIGURE
Congress	Swept the general seats, winning about 90 percent of non Muslim seats and forming governments in eight provinces.
Muslim League, central assembly	Won every single Muslim seat .
Muslim League, provincial assemblies	Won about 425 of the 496 Muslim seats , roughly 75 percent of the Muslim vote.
Punjab	The League emerged as the largest party but a Unionist, Congress and Akali coalition took office under Khizr Hyat Khan Tiwana. This is the government that will be brought down in early 1947.
North West Frontier Province	Congress won and formed the government under Dr Khan Sahib. The Frontier stayed with the Congress even in 1946.

WHAT THIS ELECTION SETTLED AND WHAT IT DID NOT**IT MADE JINNAH LEGITIMATE. IT DID NOT MAKE PARTITION INEVITABLE.**

Settled: after January 1946, nobody could say the Muslim League did not speak for most politically active Indian Muslims. In 1937 that claim was absurd. In 1946 it was demonstrated at the ballot box. Every argument about Partition has to accept this.

Not settled: what the vote was *for*. The franchise was still limited to roughly one adult in six by property and education. The League campaigned on Pakistan as a promise of protection and dignity whose actual shape was never specified, as Part 4 showed. Voting for a party demanding an unspecified Pakistan is not the same as voting to leave one's home, and within eighteen months tens of millions of the people who had voted for it would discover the difference.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cabinet Mission: The Last Plan for a United India

This is the plan almost nobody has heard of, and it is the one that came closest to keeping India whole.

The mission

In March 1946 the British Cabinet sent three senior ministers to India: Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and A. V. Alexander. Their task was to find a constitutional settlement and arrange a transfer of power.

After a further failed conference at Simla in May, the Mission published its own plan on **16 May 1946**.

What it proposed

A three tier structure, and it is worth understanding because it is the only serious attempt anyone made to answer the problem this whole book has described.

1. **A Union of India** covering British India and the princely states, with a central government responsible for exactly three subjects: foreign affairs, defence and communications, plus the power to raise the money for them. Nothing else.
2. **Three groups of provinces**, each free to write its own group constitution and decide which subjects to handle in common.
 - **Group A:** the Hindu majority provinces, Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces and Orissa.
 - **Group B:** Punjab, the North West Frontier Province, Sindh and Baluchistan.
 - **Group C:** Bengal and Assam.
3. **The provinces**, holding all remaining powers, which was almost everything that touched daily life.
4. **An escape clause:** a province could vote to leave its group, and after ten years any province could call for reconsideration of the constitution.

And the Mission said something very important in its own statement: it had examined the demand for a separate sovereign Pakistan and **rejected it**, on the ground that a Pakistan of the whole of Punjab and Bengal would contain enormous non Muslim populations, while a Pakistan of only the Muslim majority districts would be too small and truncated to be worth having. That analysis, made in May 1946, is exactly what happened in August 1947.

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

The Cabinet Mission offered Jinnah the substance of what he said he wanted without breaking the country. Muslim majority provinces would be grouped together and would run almost everything themselves. Delhi would handle only the army, foreign affairs and the post office.

It was, in effect, Pakistan inside India. And on 6 June 1946 the Muslim League accepted it.

Both sides accepted it

- **6 June 1946:** the Muslim League Council accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan, while recording that it did so because the grouping arrangement gave the substance of Pakistan.
- **24 to 25 June 1946:** the Congress accepted the long term plan, with reservations, while declining to join the interim government on the terms then offered.

For a few weeks in the summer of 1946, both major parties had accepted the same constitutional scheme for a single undivided India. That is the closest anyone ever came.

The crack in it

The plan contained one deliberate ambiguity, and everything turned on it.

Was **grouping compulsory**? The League and the Mission said yes: a province had to sit in its section first, and could only opt out after the group constitution was framed. The Congress said no: a province, meaning above all Assam in Group C and the Frontier in Group B, could decline to enter its section at the start.

This was not a technicality. If grouping was compulsory, Assam, which was Hindu majority, would be dragged into a Muslim majority group by Bengal's votes, and the Frontier, which had just elected a Congress government, would be locked in with Punjab. If grouping was optional, Group B and Group C fell apart and there was no Pakistan in substance at all.

The Mission had left the words vague on purpose, in order to get both signatures. That is a very common negotiating technique and it usually works. This time it detonated.

CHAPTER THREE

10 July 1946: Did Nehru Destroy It?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"The Cabinet Mission Plan had been accepted by everyone. India would have stayed united. Then Nehru held a press conference in Bombay and announced that the Congress was not bound by anything and would change the plan once it got into the Constituent Assembly. Jinnah withdrew, called Direct Action Day, and the killing started. Nehru's arrogance in one press conference cost India its unity and a million lives."

What happened first: how Nehru became president

In April 1946 the Congress had to choose a president, and everyone knew the president would lead the interim government and probably become Prime Minister.

Twelve of the fifteen Pradesh Congress Committees nominated **Sardar Patel**. None nominated Nehru. Gandhi made it known that he wanted Nehru, on the grounds that Nehru was better suited to deal with the British and with the world, and he asked Patel to withdraw. Patel withdrew without a word of complaint.

Whatever you conclude from the rest of this chapter, hold on to that fact, because it is the origin of one of the biggest arguments in modern Indian politics and it will return in Part 12.

The press conference

On **10 July 1946**, in Bombay, the new Congress president gave a press conference. He said that the Congress had agreed only to enter the Constituent Assembly, and that once there it would be **completely unfettered by agreements** and free to change the plan as it thought best. Asked specifically about grouping, he indicated the Congress view that it was not compulsory and suggested the groups might not survive contact with the provinces' own wishes.

Every word of that was arguably the Congress's honest legal position. It was also, politically, a gift to a man looking for a reason to walk away.

What Jinnah did

On **29 July 1946** the Muslim League Council met at Bombay, withdrew its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan, withdrew from the Constituent Assembly, and called on Muslims to observe **16 August 1946** as Direct Action Day. Jinnah said in that session that the League was bidding goodbye to constitutional methods.

Testing the claim

What supports it. The sequence is undeniable and the timing is exact: acceptance, press conference, withdrawal, Direct Action Day, nineteen days apart. And the most serious witness against Nehru is not a League partisan. It is Maulana Azad, a Congress Muslim and former Congress president, who wrote in *India Wins Freedom* that Nehru's statement was a grave blunder which gave Jinnah the opportunity he had been waiting for, and who described his own decision to step aside in Nehru's favour as one of the greatest mistakes of his life.

What weakens it. Three things.

- **Jinnah was already looking for the exit.** He had accepted the plan on the explicit basis that grouping gave the substance of Pakistan. If grouping was optional, the plan gave him nothing, and he would have discovered that with or without a press conference. The ambiguity was in the document, not in Nehru's mouth.
- **The Congress objection was real.** Forcing Assam and the Frontier into groups against the expressed will of their elected governments was not a small matter of pride. It meant handing two provinces to an arrangement their voters had just rejected.
- **The plan may not have been workable anyway.** A central government with three subjects, no independent revenue base beyond what those subjects required, and a right of secession built in after ten years, is a very weak thing. Many historians think it would have unravelled into partition within a decade, only more slowly and possibly more violently.

VERDICT ON "NEHRU DESTROYED THE LAST CHANCE"

HALF TRUE. A REAL AND SERIOUS ERROR, BUT NOT A SUFFICIENT CAUSE.

TRUE that the statement was unnecessary, that it was made by a man who had just been given the presidency over the choice of twelve provincial committees, that it handed Jinnah a pretext, and that Azad blamed him for it in print.

FALSE that it alone caused Partition. The fatal ambiguity about grouping was written into the plan by the British before Nehru said anything, and it was an ambiguity that could not survive contact with reality: grouping could not be simultaneously compulsory enough to satisfy the League and optional enough to satisfy Assam and the Frontier.

My reading: the Cabinet Mission Plan was a brilliant piece of drafting that concealed an impossibility. Nehru's press conference did not create the impossibility. It removed the polite covering from it about a year earlier than it would have come off anyway.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Killing Begins

From here the story stops being about constitutional documents. In the twelve months from August 1946 the argument moved into the streets, and once it did, no plan on paper could survive it.

Direct Action Day and the Great Calcutta Killing, 16 to 19 August 1946

Bengal was governed by a Muslim League ministry under H. S. Suhrawardy. The provincial government declared 16 August a public holiday, which put crowds on the streets, closed shops and emptied offices.

What followed was four days of slaughter in Calcutta. Estimates of the dead range from **4,000 to 10,000**, with around 15,000 wounded and roughly 100,000 left homeless. It began with attacks on Hindus and became a two way massacre within a day, with Hindu and Sikh groups organising and retaliating on a comparable scale.

The police did not act effectively for a long and unexplained period, and the conduct of the provincial government during those days remains one of the most serious charges in the whole history of the League.

Noakhali, October and November 1946

The violence travelled east into the rural districts of Noakhali and Tipperah in Bengal, where Hindus were a small minority. What happened there included mass killing, forced conversion, abduction of women and the burning of villages. Estimates of Hindu deaths are commonly given at around **5,000**, with tens of thousands driven from their homes.

Gandhi, then seventy seven, went to Noakhali in November 1946 and stayed for four months. He walked barefoot from village to village, through about forty seven villages, staying in Muslim homes, holding prayer meetings, and trying to persuade people to allow their neighbours to return. He sent his companions to live alone in separate villages as hostages for the peace. Whatever anyone thinks of his politics, this was an old man walking unarmed into a district where people were being killed for their religion, and staying there for months.

Bihar, October and November 1946

Then it came back the other way, and worse. In Bihar, which had a Congress government, Hindu mobs attacked Muslim villages in retaliation for Noakhali. Estimates of Muslim deaths run from about **7,000 to 10,000**, with Hindu deaths in the low hundreds. It was the single largest death toll of the whole 1946 sequence.

Gandhi left Noakhali for Bihar in March 1947 and told Bihar's Hindus, in public, that what they had done was worse than Noakhali because they had claimed to be avenging it. Nehru went to Bihar and said publicly that he would order aircraft to bomb the mobs if the killing did not stop. It is worth recording, against the charge examined in Part 11, that the Congress leadership

condemned the violence committed by Hindus in a state its own party governed, in the harshest terms, in public.

Garhmukteshwar, November 1946, and Rawalpindi, March 1947

At Garhmukteshwar in the United Provinces, a fair turned into a massacre of Muslims, with estimates in the low thousands.

In March 1947, after the Unionist coalition government of Punjab fell and the League launched a mass agitation, violence broke out across the Rawalpindi division. Between 7,000 and 8,000 Sikhs and Hindus were killed in a few days, villages such as Thoa Khalsa were destroyed, and mass abductions took place. At Thoa Khalsa a large number of Sikh women drowned themselves in a well rather than be taken. The Rawalpindi killings triggered the first mass flight of Hindus and Sikhs out of west Punjab, five months before any border was drawn.

THE PATTERN, AND WHY IT MATTERED MORE THAN ANY SPEECH

Notice the machine. Calcutta produced Noakhali. Noakhali produced Bihar. Bihar produced Garhmukteshwar. Rawalpindi produced the flight from west Punjab, which produced the retaliation in east Punjab that autumn. Each massacre was carried out by people who believed, often correctly, that they were responding to the last one.

And each one made Partition look less like a political demand and more like a fire escape. By the spring of 1947 the argument had changed completely. It was no longer about constitutional groupings. It was about how to stop the killing, and the only answer anybody could see was to separate the people.

That is the honest answer to the question of why sensible Indians accepted something they had opposed for thirty years. They were not persuaded by the two nation theory. They were exhausted, frightened and out of ideas.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Government That Could Not Govern

While the country burned, an experiment was tried: put both parties in one cabinet and see if they could work together. The answer arrived quickly.

The interim government

On 2 September 1946 an interim government took office with Nehru as Vice President of the Viceroy's Executive Council, which made him effectively Prime Minister. The Muslim League stayed out. Then, in October 1946, Jinnah changed course and the League joined, sending five members including **Liaquat Ali Khan**, who took Finance.

The League did not join to make the government work. Jinnah said openly that the League was entering in order to fight for Pakistan from inside, and it declined to attend the Constituent Assembly which met for the first time in December 1946.

The Finance portfolio, and how one ministry paralysed a country

Giving Finance to Liaquat Ali Khan turned out to be a decisive mistake by the Congress, which had underestimated what the department could do. Every proposal from every other ministry required financial sanction. Every appointment required money. Liaquat used that power methodically.

In February 1947 he presented what became known as the poor man's budget, with a sharp tax on business profits and a commission to investigate tax evasion. Presented as socialism, it fell heaviest on the largely Hindu commercial classes who funded the Congress, and it was designed to make Congress ministers choose between their principles and their backers. Sardar Patel is reported to have said that a Congress peon could not be appointed without Liaquat's approval.

The lesson that Congress leaders drew from those months was the one that mattered most. Patel in particular concluded that a united India in which the League held a permanent share of power at the centre would not be a country at all. It would be a permanent deadlock. That conclusion, formed in the winter of 1946 to 1947, is why Patel became the first senior Congress leader to accept Partition.

The British set a date

On **20 February 1947** Attlee announced in the Commons that Britain would transfer power by June 1948, and that Lord Mountbatten would replace Wavell as Viceroy.

Announcing a deadline was intended to force the Indian parties to settle. Its actual effect was the opposite. It told every armed group in Punjab and Bengal exactly how long they had to change the facts on the ground before the lines were drawn. The violence of 1947 was, in part, a race against a published date.

Mountbatten arrived on 22 March 1947 and within weeks moved the date forward by ten months, to **15 August 1947**. His reasons were that the situation was deteriorating too fast to wait. The consequence was that everything which follows in this part, including the drawing of an international border, had to be done in about ten weeks.

CHAPTER SIX

Who Agreed to Partition, and When

The order surprises almost everybody, so here it is with dates.

DATE	WHO	WHAT
1940 and 1945	Dr B. R. Ambedkar	In <i>Pakistan or the Partition of India</i> he examined the demand seriously and concluded that if Muslims genuinely wanted a separate state they should have it, but that it must be accompanied by a complete transfer of populations, on the Greek and Turkish model. He was the first major Indian leader to say in print that separation was preferable to a permanently divided army and state. Part 9 goes into his reasoning properly.
Winter 1946 to early 1947	Sardar Patel	The first of the senior Congress leaders to accept Partition, on the reasoning set out in Chapter 5. His position was that it was better to have a strong smaller India than a paralysed larger one, and that Congress should insist in return on partitioning Punjab and Bengal.
8 March 1947	The Congress Working Committee	Passed a resolution demanding that Punjab be partitioned into Muslim majority and non Muslim majority halves. Read that date again. This is five months before independence, and it is the Congress formally demanding the division of a province. Once you demand the partition of Punjab on communal lines, you have accepted the principle.
March to April 1947	Jawaharlal Nehru	Came round after Patel, on similar reasoning about the impossibility of the interim government and the impossibility of governing with a centre that had no power.
2 to 3 June 1947	All parties	Mountbatten's plan accepted by the Congress, the Muslim League and Baldev Singh for the Sikhs at a meeting on 2 June. Announced publicly on 3 June 1947 .
9 to 10 June 1947	Muslim League Council	Ratified the plan.
14 to 15 June 1947	All India Congress Committee	Debated and ratified the resolution accepting Partition. It was moved by Nehru and seconded by Patel. Veteran leaders including Purushottam Das Tandon, Govind Ballabh Pant and others spoke against it. Gandhi then spoke, for about forty five minutes, and asked the members to support it. The resolution was carried by a large majority. Precise vote counts circulate, most commonly 157 in favour and 29 against with abstentions, but I have not been able to verify those exact figures from the official record and I flag them as unconfirmed.

VERDICT ON "THE CONGRESS ACCEPTED PARTITION BEFORE GANDHI DID"

TRUE, AND MORE THAN THAT

Patel accepted it first, months before anyone else. The Congress Working Committee demanded the partition of Punjab on 8 March 1947, before the plan for the partition of India even existed. Nehru followed. The AICC ratified it on 15 June.

And Gandhi did not merely acquiesce. He spoke at the AICC meeting and asked the members to accept the resolution, after other veterans had spoken against it. That is in the *Collected Works* and it is not seriously disputed.

Which raises the obvious question, and it is the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gandhi: Over My Dead Body?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Gandhi said India would be cut only over his dead body, and then it was cut and he was still alive. He fasted for everything else, including money for Pakistan, but he did not fast against Partition. That proves he either wanted it or did not care."

What he actually said, and when

His opposition was consistent and public for seven years. He wrote and said repeatedly that the vivisection of India was a sin, that he would not be party to it, and that if it came it would be over his dead body. He offered, in 1947, that Mountbatten should dissolve the interim government and invite Jinnah to form a government of his own choosing, with the Congress in opposition, rather than divide the country. The Congress leadership rejected the idea as unworkable. Mountbatten treated it as impossible.

Why he did not fast against it

He was asked this directly at the time, more than once, and his answers are on the record. They come down to three things.

- **A fast is aimed at people who love you.** Gandhi's own doctrine was that a fast is legitimate only against those who acknowledge a bond with the faster, and only when they are being asked to do something they know in their hearts is right. He held that fasting to force the Congress and the country to reject a settlement that the Congress and the country had accepted would be coercion of his own people, not persuasion.
- **He had lost the argument, and he knew it.** He said in these months that he had become a back number, that nobody listened to him any more, and that he was a voice in the wilderness. That was not self pity, it was an accurate description. The Working Committee decided without him and informed him afterwards.
- **He judged that the alternative was worse.** By June 1947 he was watching a civil war beginning. His speech at the AICC accepted the resolution as the least bad course available at that moment, while continuing to call the division itself wrong.

What he did instead

This is the part that gets left out of the accusation entirely.

He did not attend the independence celebrations on 15 August 1947. There was no flag ceremony for him, no seat on a dais, no speech. While Delhi celebrated, he was in Calcutta, in a poor Muslim locality, fasting and walking, trying to stop the killing in the city that had started it all in August 1946.

And it worked. Calcutta, which everyone expected to be the worst place in India in August 1947, stayed largely quiet. Mountbatten wrote to him that in Punjab it had taken fifty five thousand soldiers to hold the situation and there had been rioting on a great scale, while in Bengal the force had been one man, and there had been no rioting. The phrase that stuck was that Gandhi had been a **one man boundary force**.

He fasted again in Calcutta in early September when violence flared, and again in Delhi in January 1948, which is Chapter 10.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI ALLOWED PARTITION"

TRUE IN OUTCOME. FALSE IN MOTIVE. AND THE REASON IS THE INTERESTING PART.

TRUE that he did not prevent it, that he asked the AICC to accept the resolution, and that his declaration about it happening over his dead body was not carried out.

FALSE that this shows he wanted it or was indifferent. He opposed it for seven years in public, proposed an extraordinary alternative in 1947 that would have handed the government to Jinnah rather than divide the country, boycotted the independence celebrations, and spent the day of freedom in a Calcutta slum trying to stop a massacre.

The accurate statement, and it is a sadder one than either side's version: by 1947 Gandhi could no longer control the organisation he had built. The men he had trained had concluded that his position was impossible and had stopped consulting him. He was the most revered man in India and he had almost no power, which are two entirely different things, exactly as Rule 4 in Part 1 warned.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Radcliffe: A Border in Five Weeks

The line that decided where about fifteen million people would have to live was drawn by a lawyer who had never been east of Europe.

The appointment

Sir Cyril Radcliffe was a distinguished English barrister with no experience of India. He had never visited the country. He was appointed chairman of both the Punjab and the Bengal Boundary Commissions and arrived in India on **8 July 1947**. He was given about five weeks.

His lack of knowledge was presented as the qualification. Because he knew nothing and had no connections, he could not be accused of favouring anyone.

Each commission had four other members, two nominated by the Congress and two by the Muslim League, all judges. They deadlocked on every significant question, exactly as anyone could have predicted. So the decisions were made by Radcliffe alone, working from out of date maps and census returns, in the heat of a Delhi summer, without ever visiting most of the areas he was dividing.

What the line did

- It cut through Punjab and Bengal, two provinces with deeply mixed populations, dividing districts, canal systems, railway lines, road networks and in some places individual villages and fields.
- It left the headworks of the canals that irrigated west Punjab on the Indian side, creating a water dispute that has lasted to this day.
- In Bengal it separated the jute growing districts from the jute mills of Calcutta, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, whose population was overwhelmingly non Muslim and tribal, were awarded to Pakistan.
- The award of the Gurdaspur district to India, on grounds Radcliffe explained in terms of river boundaries and communications, gave India its only road access to Kashmir and remains one of the most disputed decisions in South Asian history.

The two days that killed people

The awards were substantially ready by 12 August 1947. They were not published until **17 August 1947**, two days after both countries had already become independent.

Mountbatten decided on the delay, and his reasoning, as he later explained it, was that if the line were announced before the transfer of power the British would have to enforce it and would be blamed for the consequences. Whatever the motive, the consequence was this: on 14 and 15 August 1947, millions of people in Punjab and Bengal did not know which country they were in.

Families celebrated independence in towns that turned out, two days later, to be in the other country. Officials did not know whose orders to obey. Police and army units did not know whose side of a border they were policing. And armed groups, who could make a very good guess at where the line would fall, used those days.

Radcliffe left India on the day the award was published. He refused his fee of forty thousand rupees, and he destroyed his working papers.

VERDICT ON THE BOUNDARY

THE LINE WAS DEFENSIBLE. THE PROCESS WAS INDEFENSIBLE.

On the line itself: given a task of dividing Punjab and Bengal on the basis of contiguous majority areas, almost any honest person would have drawn something close to what Radcliffe drew. The specific disputed decisions, above all Gurdaspur and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, are arguable, and the accusation that Mountbatten influenced the Ferozepur and Gurdaspur decisions has been made seriously by historians and has never been conclusively proved or disproved.

On the process: five weeks, one foreign lawyer, deadlocked commissions, no consultation, no phased transfer, no arrangements for the movement of populations that everybody knew was coming, and publication two days after the event. That is not a boundary settlement. It is an evacuation carried out at speed and dressed as a legal award.

Where responsibility sits: the timetable was Mountbatten's, and the decision to advance the date from June 1948 to August 1947 removed the time in which the transfer might have been managed. But Indian and Pakistani leaders agreed to that timetable, and both wanted power quickly. Nobody in the room insisted on taking the time to do it safely.

CHAPTER NINE

The Numbers

This chapter is short, because there is not much to say beyond the figures, and the figures are almost impossible to hold in the mind.

WHAT	ESTIMATE	NOTE
Killed	200,000 to 2 million	The range is enormous because no census of the dead was ever taken. The most commonly used working figure among historians is around one million . Lower estimates come from contemporary official counts, higher ones from demographic analysis of missing populations.
Displaced	12 to 20 million	Most accounts settle around 14 to 18 million . It is the largest forced migration in human history.
Women abducted	75,000 to 100,000	Abducted, raped, forcibly married or forcibly converted, on both sides. India and Pakistan later signed an inter dominion agreement and India passed the Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Act in 1949 to recover them, a process that itself caused enormous further suffering when women who had built new lives were removed again.
Where it was worst	Punjab	Punjab, divided between two new countries with mixed populations everywhere, saw the most concentrated killing. Bengal's migration was slower, larger in total and stretched over decades, which is why it is less remembered and matters enormously in Part 10.

Two things about these numbers deserve emphasis.

First, the violence was not spontaneous everywhere. In Punjab in particular it was organised, by armed bands on all three sides, often led by demobilised soldiers with military training from the war that had just ended, using weapons that had come home with them. The men who had been trained to fight fascism in 1943 were killing their neighbours in 1947.

Second, the state failed completely. The Punjab Boundary Force, set up to police the division, numbered about 55,000 men for a region of some fourteen million people, was itself communally mixed and began to disintegrate, and was disbanded on 1 September 1947, barely two weeks after independence.

CHAPTER TEN

The Fifty Five Crore Fast

This is the last accusation of Part 8, and it is the one that got Gandhi killed. It is also, as usually told, wrong in an important way.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"After Partition, India rightly withheld 55 crore rupees from Pakistan because Pakistan had invaded Kashmir. Gandhi went on a fast unto death to force his own government to hand the money to an enemy country that was at that moment killing Indian soldiers. He fasted for Pakistan against India."

What the money was

Under the financial settlement of Partition, the cash balances of undivided India were to be divided. Pakistan's share was fixed at **Rs 75 crore**. An initial **Rs 20 crore** was paid. The remaining **Rs 55 crore** was withheld by the Government of India after fighting began in Kashmir in October 1947, on the argument that money should not be handed over to a state using force against India.

Two facts about that decision matter and are usually omitted. The payment was a **contractual obligation** under the partition agreement, not a gift. And Mountbatten, then Governor General, took the view that withholding it was dishonourable and would damage India's standing.

What the fast was actually about

This is where the accusation goes wrong. Gandhi began his last fast in Delhi on **13 January 1948**. Delhi at that moment was a city where Muslims were being killed, driven out of their homes and their shops, and where mosques had been occupied and in some cases converted.

His stated conditions for ending the fast were about Delhi, and about communal peace. They included the safety and free movement of Muslims in the capital, the restoration of mosques that had been taken over, the return of Muslim families to homes from which they had been evicted, and normal social and economic dealings between the communities. A peace committee representing Hindu, Muslim and Sikh organisations, and the government, gave those undertakings on 18 January and the fast ended.

The release of the Rs 55 crore was announced by the Government of India during the fast, on 15 January. It was, on the record, a factor and Gandhi welcomed it. It was not the stated object of the fast, and the fast did not end when the money was paid. It ended three days later when the Delhi undertakings were given.

VERDICT ON THE 55 CRORE FAST**MISLEADING**

TRUE that Gandhi supported paying Pakistan the money, that he considered withholding it a breach of a signed agreement and a moral failure, and that the government released it during his fast.

FALSE that the fast was undertaken for the money. Its stated conditions were about the protection of Muslims in Delhi and the restoration of communal peace in the capital, and it ended when those undertakings were given, three days after the payment was announced.

Also false by omission: the payment was a legal obligation under the partition settlement, and the Governor General held the same view Gandhi did.

Why it matters: this accusation was one of the reasons Nathuram Godse gave in court for killing him. A man was shot dead on 30 January 1948 partly on the strength of a claim about his own fast that is not accurate. Part 11 examines Godse's statement in full.

CLOSING

Where We Have Reached

Seventeen months. That is the whole distance from a plan for a united India that both parties had accepted to a border published two days after the countries it divided came into existence.

If you want the shortest honest account of how Partition happened, it is this. A plan existed and was accepted by both sides. Its central ambiguity could not survive contact with reality, and a press conference exposed that a year early. A day of direct action turned into four days of massacre, and the massacres then fed each other around the country for twelve months until separation looked like the only way to stop the dying. A joint government was made unworkable from inside. The senior Congress leadership concluded that a weak centre shared with the League was worse than a smaller country, and it demanded the partition of Punjab five months before it accepted the partition of India. A deadline was announced, then advanced by ten months. A border was drawn in five weeks and published two days late. And between one hundred thousand and two million people died.

Nobody in that sequence set out to kill a million people. Almost everybody in it made a decision that, added to the others, produced exactly that.

In Part 9 we stop the clock and go through the leaders one by one: what each of them actually believed, what each said about Partition with dates and quotations, what each got right and what each got badly wrong. Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar, Jinnah, Azad, Savarkar, Bose, Master Tara Singh, Ghaffar Khan, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and others.

Timeline for Part 8

DATE	EVENT
June to July 1945	Congress leaders released. Simla Conference fails over Jinnah's demand for the sole right to nominate Muslims.
Winter 1945 to 1946	Elections. Muslim League wins every Muslim seat in the central assembly and about 425 of 496 provincial Muslim seats.
February 1946	Royal Indian Navy mutiny. See Part 7.
March 1946	Cabinet Mission arrives.
16 May 1946	Cabinet Mission Plan published. Three tier scheme. A separate sovereign Pakistan explicitly rejected.
6 June 1946	Muslim League accepts the plan.
24 to 25 June 1946	Congress accepts the long term plan with reservations.
10 July 1946	Nehru's press conference in Bombay.

DATE	EVENT
29 July 1946	Muslim League withdraws acceptance and calls for Direct Action Day.
16 to 19 August 1946	Direct Action Day and the Great Calcutta Killing. 4,000 to 10,000 dead.
2 September 1946	Interim government takes office under Nehru.
October 1946	Muslim League joins the interim government. Liaquat Ali Khan takes Finance.
October to November 1946	Noakhali, about 5,000 dead. Bihar, 7,000 to 10,000 dead. Garhmukteshwar.
November 1946 to March 1947	Gandhi's Noakhali walk through about forty seven villages.
December 1946	Constituent Assembly meets. The Muslim League does not attend.
February 1947	Liaquat's poor man's budget.
20 February 1947	Attlee announces transfer of power by June 1948 and Mountbatten's appointment.
March 1947	Rawalpindi massacres. 7,000 to 8,000 Hindus and Sikhs killed.
8 March 1947	Congress Working Committee demands the partition of Punjab.
22 March 1947	Mountbatten arrives and soon advances the date to 15 August 1947.
2 to 3 June 1947	Mountbatten Plan accepted by Congress, the League and Baldev Singh, and announced.
14 to 15 June 1947	AICC ratifies Partition. Gandhi speaks in support of the resolution.
8 July 1947	Radcliffe arrives in India.
18 July 1947	Indian Independence Act receives royal assent.
14 and 15 August 1947	Pakistan and India become independent. The boundary is not yet published. Gandhi is in Calcutta.
17 August 1947	Radcliffe Award published.
1 September 1947	Punjab Boundary Force disbanded.
September 1947	Gandhi's Calcutta fast. Mountbatten's one man boundary force letter.
October 1947	Fighting begins in Kashmir. India withholds Rs 55 crore.
13 to 18 January 1948	Gandhi's last fast in Delhi. The Rs 55 crore released on 15 January. The fast ends on 18 January on the Delhi undertakings.
30 January 1948	Gandhi assassinated. See Part 11.

Word list

Cabinet Mission	The three British ministers sent in March 1946, and the constitutional plan they published on 16 May 1946.
Grouping	The Cabinet Mission scheme of placing provinces into three sections, A, B and C, each writing its own group constitution. Whether it was compulsory was the fatal dispute.
Constituent Assembly	The body elected to write India's constitution, which first met in December 1946.
Interim government	The government formed in September 1946 under Nehru, joined by the Muslim League in October.
Direct Action Day	16 August 1946, called by the Muslim League after withdrawing from the Cabinet Mission Plan.
Mountbatten Plan	The plan announced on 3 June 1947 providing for partition and a transfer of power on 15 August 1947.
Boundary Commission	The two commissions, for Punjab and Bengal, chaired by Radcliffe, whose members deadlocked so that he decided alone.
Radcliffe Award	The boundary decision, ready on 12 August 1947 and published on 17 August 1947.
Punjab Boundary Force	The force of about 55,000 men created to police the division of Punjab, disbanded on 1 September 1947.
Crore	Ten million. Rs 55 crore is 550 million rupees.

Sources used in Part 8

- Statement of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy, 16 May 1946, full text.
- Resolutions of the All India Muslim League Council, 6 June 1946 and 29 July 1946.
- Congress Working Committee resolutions of June 1946, 8 March 1947 and 2 June 1947.
- Report of Nehru's press conference at Bombay, 10 July 1946, in the contemporary press and in the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, for the account of the Cabinet Mission, the press conference and the Congress presidency of 1946.
- Sciences Po Mass Violence and Resistance research file on the Calcutta riots of 1946, and the official inquiry material on the Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar violence.
- Records and studies of the Rawalpindi massacres of March 1947, including the Punjab research literature.
- *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, volume 88, including the speech at the All India Congress Committee meeting of 14 June 1947, and the Noakhali and Calcutta material.

- Mountbatten's correspondence with Gandhi, August and September 1947, including the one man boundary force letter.
- Report of the Punjab Boundary Commission and the Bengal Boundary Commission, and the Radcliffe Award, published 17 August 1947.
- Indian Independence Act 1947.
- Standard demographic studies of Partition casualties and migration, including the analyses producing the ranges of 200,000 to 2 million dead and 12 to 20 million displaced.
- Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Act, 1949, and the inter dominion agreements on recovery of abducted women.
- *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* and contemporary press reports for the fast of 13 to 18 January 1948 and its stated conditions.

COMING NEXT

Part 9: What Each Leader Actually Believed. One by one, with dates and quotations: Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar, Jinnah, Azad, Savarkar, Golwalkar, Bose, Master Tara Singh, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Periyar, Sheikh Abdullah and Rajaji. For each one: the core idea, the position on Partition, the best quotes with dates, what they got right and what they got wrong. Including Ambedkar's argument for population transfer, and the thirty sealed pages of Azad's memoir.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART NINE OF TWELVE

What Each Leader Actually Believed

*Sixteen men and their real positions on Partition,
with dates, quotations, and an honest scorecard for each*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This part is built differently from the others. It is a reference section.

Every leader here gets exactly the same treatment, in the same order, with the same headings: his core idea, his position on Partition, his best quotations with dates, what he got right and what he got wrong. Nobody gets a longer defence than anybody else. Nobody gets his embarrassing period left out.

I have done it this way on purpose. The usual method in Indian argument is to give your hero a biography and your opponent a charge sheet. Once you force every figure through the same template, that trick stops working, and some surprising things become visible. You will find that the man usually called the architect of Pakistan spent the first half of his career as the leading advocate of Hindu and Muslim unity. You will find a Congress leader who proposed a partition formula in 1944 and was hounded for it. You will find that the Sikh community, which lost more than anyone, was never seriously consulted by anybody.

Two warnings. First, this part necessarily repeats some material from earlier parts, because a profile has to stand on its own. Second, several of these men changed their positions substantially, and I have given the change rather than freezing them at their most quotable moment.

At the end there is a single table showing who opposed Partition to the last day, who accepted it and when, and who wanted it. It is the most useful page in this book.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART NINE

THE BIG SIX	Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar, Azad
THE HINDU NATIONALISTS	Savarkar, Golwalkar, Syama Prasad Mookerjee
THE DISSENTERS	Bose, Rajagopalachari, Jayaprakash Narayan
THE PEOPLE WHO PAID	Master Tara Singh, Baldev Singh, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan
THE REGIONAL VOICES	Periyar, Sheikh Abdullah, Fazlul Huq, Sikandar Hyat Khan
THE SCORECARD	Who opposed, who accepted, and on what date
CLOSING	Word list, sources, what comes next

PROFILE ONE

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

1869 to 1948. The core idea: that means and ends cannot be separated, and that a people who take power by methods that degrade them will not be free when they get it.

Position on Partition

Opposed absolutely and publicly from 1940 to the end. He called it a vivisection and a sin, said it would happen over his dead body, and in 1947 proposed to Mountbatten that the interim government be dissolved and Jinnah invited to form a government of his own choosing, with the Congress in opposition, rather than divide the country. That proposal was rejected as fantastic by his own colleagues.

He then, on 14 June 1947, asked the All India Congress Committee to accept the partition resolution, having concluded that he had lost the argument and that the alternative in front of him was civil war.

"Cut me in two before you cut the country."

The position he repeated in many forms from 1940 onwards

What he got right

- The method. A disarmed people with no weapons and no money defeated an empire without an anti colonial war, and Part 7 showed how rare that is.
- The organisation. He built the machine that made a peaceful transfer possible.
- The diagnosis of separate electorates in 1932, which Part 4 examined. He was right that permanent communal representation makes a nation impossible, and history has borne him out.
- Noakhali and Calcutta. At seventy seven and seventy eight he did the physically bravest work of his life, and it saved a city.

What he got wrong

- Khilafat. He spent the entire capital of Hindu and Muslim unity on a foreign religious cause and secured no constitutional settlement in return.
- Malabar. He applied his moral standard to one community and not to the other, and lost Hindu confidence permanently.
- 1932. Whatever the merits of his objection, he used his own life as a lever against the weakest party at the table.
- Succession. Choosing Nehru over Patel in 1946, against twelve of fifteen provincial committees, had consequences he never accounted for.
- He assumed personal moral force could substitute for institutional guarantees, and by 1946 it could not.

PROFILE TWO

Muhammad Ali Jinnah

1876 to 1948. The core idea: that a permanent minority in a head counting democracy has no protection except a state of its own, or a share of power written into law that the majority cannot revise.

The man nobody expects

Jinnah's first career is the opposite of his second, and this is the single most important fact about him.

He was a Bombay barrister, a Congressman from 1906, a follower of Gokhale, a man who wore Savile Row suits, spoke little Urdu, ate and drank what he liked and had almost no interest in religious observance. He was the principal architect of the **Lucknow Pact of 1916**, the greatest moment of Hindu and Muslim political unity in the colonial period, and Gokhale called him the best ambassador of Hindu and Muslim unity.

He opposed the Khilafat movement in 1920 and resigned from the Congress at Nagpur over it, warning that mixing religion into mass politics would end in disaster. In 1920, Jinnah was the man arguing against religion in politics and Gandhi was the man putting it there.

What changed him

- The rejection of his Fourteen Points in 1929. The constitutional route had failed.
- The 1937 elections and the United Provinces coalition refusal, which is Part 4.
- The Congress ministries of 1937 to 1939 and the grievance they generated, real or manufactured.
- Personal loss and illness. His wife Ruttie died in 1929. He was tubercular by the 1940s and knew he had little time, a fact he kept secret and which explains a great deal about the pace he set after 1946.

Position on Partition

He demanded it from the Lahore Resolution of 23 March 1940 and obtained it. Whether he wanted it as a country or as a bargaining position is the great unresolved question, and Part 4 laid out both readings. What is documented is that in June 1946 he **accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan**, which was not Pakistan, on the ground that grouping gave its substance. A man who has accepted a united India in June cannot easily be said to have wanted nothing else.

What he got right

- The arithmetic. In a system of counting heads, a permanent 25 percent loses permanently, and no Congress leader ever produced a convincing answer to that.

- He predicted that Congress would govern with majority assumptions, and Part 4 showed that in office it did.
- Tactically he was one of the most effective politicians of the century, taking a party from 4.4 percent to a country in nine years.

What he got wrong

- Direct Action Day. Whatever he intended by it, he called it, and Calcutta followed. He never took responsibility for that.
- He got a Pakistan he himself had called moth eaten, without the whole of Punjab or Bengal, and he had explicitly rejected exactly that outcome in earlier negotiations.
- He had no answer for the Muslims left behind in India, who were about a third of the whole. Part 10 is about the people he did not plan for.
- He built a country on a religious claim and then, on 11 August 1947, told its assembly that religion had nothing to do with the business of the state. The contradiction was never resolved and it defined Pakistan's next seventy years.

PROFILE THREE

Jawaharlal Nehru

1889 to 1964. The core idea: that India's real divisions were economic rather than religious, and that a modern, industrial, scientific and secular state would dissolve communal identities within a generation.

Position on Partition

Opposed it in principle throughout, believing the two nation theory was a colonial artefact. Accepted it in March or April 1947, after Patel, on the reasoning that a central government too weak to plan or to govern would produce a permanently paralysed India. He supported the partition of Punjab and Bengal so that India would not inherit the problem in its worst form.

What he got right

- He held the line on a secular constitution when it would have been popular to do otherwise, in a country that had just been divided on religion and was full of refugees with real grievances. Part 10 will show what that decision was worth.
- He recognised that the greatest danger after 1947 was Indian majoritarianism, and he said so repeatedly and unpopularity.
- He gave India democratic institutions, universal adult franchise from the first election and a habit of constitutionalism that its neighbours did not acquire.

What he got wrong

- The United Provinces coalition of 1937. Part 4 examined it. A serious unforced error at the worst possible moment.
- The press conference of 10 July 1946. Part 8 examined it. Another.
- Taking the Kashmir question to the United Nations in January 1948, which internationalised a dispute India could have handled bilaterally, and accepting a ceasefire with a third of the state in Pakistani hands.
- He genuinely could not understand religious politics. He thought it was false consciousness that economics would cure, and that blindness cost him repeatedly.
- China, and the military unpreparedness of 1962. That belongs to a later story than this book, but it belongs on the ledger.

PROFILE FOUR

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

1875 to 1950. The core idea: that a state which cannot enforce its writ is not a state, and that a smaller country that works is better than a larger one that cannot.

Position on Partition

The **first** of the senior Congress leaders to accept it, in the winter of 1946 to 1947, well before Nehru. His reasoning was practical rather than theoretical, and it came from watching Liaquat Ali Khan paralyse the interim government from the Finance ministry, as Part 8 described. He concluded that a united India in which the League held a permanent veto at the centre would not be a country but a deadlock.

He insisted in return on the partition of Punjab and Bengal, so that India would not be left with two provinces containing hostile majorities.

What he got right

- The integration of 565 princely states into India between 1947 and 1949, achieved almost entirely by negotiation with the threat of force in reserve, and completed in about two years. It is the single greatest administrative achievement in modern Indian history, and without it there is no India to argue about.
- Hyderabad, Junagadh and the mechanics of holding the country together.
- His judgement about the interim government was correct, and it was formed from evidence rather than from theory.

What he got wrong

- He was slower and less consistent than Nehru in condemning Hindu communal violence in 1947, and his correspondence of that period contains language about Indian Muslims proving their loyalty that Nehru would not have used.
- His organisational instincts made the Congress a machine, which served it in 1947 and damaged it later.

THE PATEL AND NEHRU QUESTION, SINCE IT ALWAYS COMES UP

Twelve of fifteen Pradesh Congress Committees nominated Patel for the presidency in 1946. None nominated Nehru. Gandhi asked Patel to withdraw and he did.

Whether India would have been better off is not a fact and cannot be one. What can be said is this. On the princely states and on internal order Patel's record is better than anything Nehru did in that field. On the secular constitution, on democratic institutions and on refusing to answer Partition with Hindu majoritarianism, Nehru's record is one that Patel's own letters suggest he might not have matched. The two men were a functioning pair, and both said so. The modern habit of using one to attack the other would have been incomprehensible to either.

PROFILE FIVE

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

1891 to 1956. The core idea: that political freedom without social equality is worthless, and that the caste system, not the British, was the primary oppression in Indian life.

Position on Partition, which is the surprise

Ambedkar wrote the most rigorous book anybody produced on the subject, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, first published in 1940 after the Lahore Resolution and revised through 1945. It is not a polemic. It is a legal and demographic analysis, and it reaches a conclusion most Indians do not expect.

He concluded that **if Muslims genuinely wanted a separate state they should be allowed to have it**, and he gave a specific strategic reason that had nothing to do with sympathy for the League.

His argument ran like this. In an undivided India the army would contain a very large proportion of Muslims from the north west, drawn from exactly the provinces whose political leadership rejected the Indian nation. A state whose army does not accept the state's legitimacy is not safe. Better a smaller India with a reliable army than a larger India with an army that might not obey it. He also argued that a Muslim minority of a third, permanently organised as a bloc, would make stable government impossible.

And he attached a condition that almost nobody quotes: he argued that partition without a **complete transfer of populations** would be worse than useless, and he cited the Greek and Turkish exchange after 1923 as the precedent. He wanted it planned, agreed, financed and orderly.

THE JUDGEMENT HISTORY HAS PASSED ON THIS

HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE PROBLEM AND HIS SOLUTION WAS NEVER TRIED

Partition happened, and the population transfer happened, but it happened as a spontaneous catastrophe rather than as a planned exchange. Between twelve and twenty million people moved, and up to two million died, without any of the agreement, transport, compensation or protection that Ambedkar had said were essential.

Whether a planned transfer of that size could ever have been humane is a fair question and I do not think anyone knows. What is certain is that the unplanned version was the worst of all possible outcomes, and he had predicted exactly that in print in 1940.

What he got right

- Everything he said in 1932 about reserved seats in joint electorates producing dependent representatives, which Part 4 covered.

- The Constitution of India, which he piloted through the drafting committee, and which is why Part 10 can be written at all.
- He insisted that Indian democracy would be a top dressing on an undemocratic society unless caste was attacked, and that warning has aged extremely well.

What he got wrong, or where he is contested

- His writing about Islam in *Pakistan or the Partition of India* is severe and generalising, and would be called communal if a Hindu nationalist had written it. His defenders say he applied identical severity to Hinduism, which is true, in *Annihilation of Caste* and elsewhere. Readers should read both and judge.
- He supported a partition whose consequences for the Dalits of what became Pakistan he did not fully anticipate, and Part 10 will show what happened to them.

PROFILE SIX

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

1888 to 1958. The core idea: that Islam did not require a separate country, that Indian Muslims were Indians whose faith had shaped India, and that Partition would abandon the majority of Indian Muslims who could not move.

The most important thing about him

Azad was a serious Islamic scholar, not a secular Muslim in the modern sense. He was educated at al Azhar, wrote a Quranic commentary, and argued against Pakistan **from within Islam**. That is why the Muslim League hated him more than it hated any Hindu leader, and why it called him a Congress showpiece. His answer was that a scholar's argument stands on its evidence, not on who finds it convenient.

He was Congress president from 1940 to 1946, the longest continuous presidency in the party's history, which meant he led the Congress through Cripps, Quit India and prison.

Position on Partition

Opposed it to the last day, and was the last senior Congress figure still fighting it after Patel and Nehru had accepted. He argued that Partition would not solve the communal problem but would relocate it, leaving a large Muslim minority in India in a far weaker position than before, and that the two nation theory would be disproved within a generation by the eastern wing.

India Wins Freedom and the thirty sealed pages

His memoir, published in 1958, is one of the essential documents of this period, and it is also an act of controlled score settling. Thirty pages were withheld and placed under seal in the National Library at Calcutta and the National Archives at Delhi. They were opened and published in **1988**, thirty years after his death.

Azad's stated reason for sealing them was that he did not wish to embarrass Nehru and Patel while they lived. The released material is more explicit in its criticism, particularly of Patel and of Nehru's role in 1946 and 1947, and confirms rather than overturns the account in the original edition.

Read Azad with the same care you would read anybody. It is a first hand account by a man who was in the room, and it is also the memoir of a man explaining why the disaster was other people's fault. Both things are true.

What he got right

- He predicted that Partition would leave Indian Muslims worse off and more vulnerable than before, and that the eastern wing would not hold. Both came true, and Part 10 has the evidence.

- His judgement on the 1937 United Provinces coalition and on the 1946 press conference was contemporaneous, from inside the leadership, and correct.

What he got wrong

- He stepped aside as Congress president in 1946, allowing Nehru to take the office at the decisive moment, and later called it one of the greatest mistakes of his life.
- He was a poor party politician who never built a base among the Muslims he claimed to represent, which is precisely why the League could dismiss him.

PROFILE SEVEN

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar

1883 to 1966. The core idea: Hindutva, defined in 1923 as belonging to those for whom India is both fatherland and holy land, and the conviction that Hindus must organise as a political nation or be ruled by those who do.

Position on Partition

Opposed it absolutely and to the end. This must be stated clearly because it is often muddled. Savarkar wanted an undivided India, Akhand Bharat, in which Hindus were recognised as the nation and others lived as citizens without special claims. He never supported the creation of Pakistan.

And in his presidential address at Ahmedabad in December 1937 he stated that India could not be assumed to be a homogeneous nation and that there were two nations in the main, the Hindus and the Muslims. Both facts are true and the tension between them is the whole argument about him.

The record, set out plainly

- A genuine revolutionary: Abhinav Bharat, the 1909 book on 1857, the Marseilles escape attempt, two life sentences, about a decade in the Cellular Jail.
- At least six petitions to the British between 1911 and 1920, whose language Part 6 quoted, followed by release in 1924 on political restrictions that he observed for thirteen years.
- The two nations formulation of 1937, three years before Jinnah made the equivalent claim League policy.
- Hindu Mahasabha coalitions with the Muslim League in Bengal, Sindh and the Frontier during his presidency, defended by him at Kanpur in 1942.
- The recruitment campaign of 1941 to 1943, praised by Bose on 25 June 1944 for supplying trained men to the INA.
- Named as an accused in the Gandhi murder trial in 1948 and **acquitted for want of evidence**. The Kapur Commission of 1969 later expressed a harsher view of his associates' contacts with him, but an acquittal is an acquittal and this book will not treat him as convicted of something he was not convicted of.

What he got right

- He identified early that a disarmed population cannot bargain, and the militarisation argument was coherent whether or not one likes it.
- He was correct that the Congress had no answer to organised communal politics beyond hoping it would dissolve.

What he got wrong

- Conceding the premise. Once you say there are two nations, you have handed the other side its entire case, and Jinnah used exactly such statements in negotiation. You cannot demand an undivided India while asserting that it contains two nations.
- The petitions and the thirteen years of observed restrictions, which no tactical explanation comfortably covers.
- Office alongside the Muslim League in 1942 while the Congress was in prison, which cost the Mahasabha any claim to the mantle of the freedom struggle.

PROFILE EIGHT

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar

1906 to 1973. Head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh from 1940 to 1973. The core idea: that the nation is built by transforming individuals through daily discipline rather than by politics, and that the Hindu nation is the nation.

Position on Partition

Opposed it. The RSS position was Akhand Bharat and it did not accept the legitimacy of the division.

The record

- *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, published under his name in 1939, whose contents Part 4 quoted, including the passage praising Germany's treatment of the Jews. The authorship is disputed, and the RSS later withdrew the book from circulation and distanced itself from it. I have given both facts in the same breath because both are true.
- His instruction that the RSS would not take part in the Quit India movement, examined in Part 6.
- RSS volunteers did substantial relief work for refugees in Punjab and Delhi in 1947, which is documented and is acknowledged by critics of the organisation.
- The RSS was banned in February 1948 after Gandhi's assassination and the ban was lifted in July 1949 after no organisational link to the murder was established.

The honest summary

His significance in this book is not personal. It is that by 1939 the hardest form of the two nation position existed on both sides at once, and each could point to the other's text.

PROFILE NINE

Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee

1901 to 1953. Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University at thirty three, Hindu Mahasabha leader, minister in the Fazlul Huq coalition, first Industry Minister of independent India, founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

Position on Partition, which is the interesting one

He opposed the partition of India. But once it became certain, he became the leading advocate of **partitioning Bengal**, so that the Hindu majority western districts including Calcutta would remain in India rather than the whole province going to Pakistan.

This matters enormously and is usually left out. In April 1947 Suhrawardy and Sarat Chandra Bose proposed a **united sovereign Bengal**, independent of both India and Pakistan. Mookerjee led the campaign against it, arguing that an independent Bengal would in practice be a Muslim majority state in which Hindus would be a helpless minority, and that Hindu majority districts must be separated and kept in India.

He won. West Bengal exists because of that campaign.

What he got right

- He was almost certainly correct about what would have happened to Bengali Hindus in a united Bengal, and Part 10's figures on East Pakistan support him.
- He resigned from the Bengal ministry in November 1942 in protest at the repression in Midnapore, which was a creditable act at real cost.
- He resigned from Nehru's cabinet in April 1950 over the Nehru Liaquat Pact, arguing that it gave India nothing enforceable in exchange for guarantees to Pakistan's minorities that Pakistan would not keep. Part 10 examines whether he was right.

What he got wrong, or where he is contested

- He had been in coalition with the Muslim League in 1941 and 1942, which sits awkwardly with the later politics.
- His campaign against Article 370 and his death in detention in Kashmir in 1953 remain contested, and his family's demand for an inquiry was never met.

PROFILE TEN

Subhas Chandra Bose

1897 to 1945. Covered fully in Part 5. Summarised here so the scorecard is complete.

Position on Partition

He died in August 1945, before Partition became a live proposition, so he never had to decide. What is on the record is unambiguous hostility to communal politics of every kind. He built the Indian National Army deliberately across religion, with Hindu, Muslim and Sikh officers eating together and community ignored in the chain of command, and his political vision for India was explicitly secular and socialist.

His Forward Bloc criticised the Hindu Mahasabha. He praised Savarkar's recruitment drive on 25 June 1944 for the specific and practical reason that it supplied trained soldiers to the INA. He called Gandhi the Father of the Nation on 6 July 1944 while at war with the empire Gandhi was opposing by other means.

The honest summary

A severe critic of Gandhi's strategy who revered the man, and an opponent of communalism who was willing to work with anyone who served the military objective. Anybody who claims him for a communal politics has to explain the composition of his own army.

PROFILE ELEVEN

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari

1878 to 1972. Gandhi's closest political associate in the south, later the last Governor General of India. The man punished for being right early.

The formula that got him hounded

In 1944 Rajaji proposed a settlement, known as the C. R. Formula. The Muslim League would endorse the demand for independence and cooperate in a provisional government. After the war, a commission would demarcate the contiguous districts in the north west and east where Muslims were an absolute majority, and a plebiscite of all the adult inhabitants of those districts, not only Muslims, would decide separation. Defence, commerce and communications would be settled by agreement.

Gandhi endorsed it and used it as the basis of his talks with Jinnah in September 1944. The talks failed, because Jinnah wanted the whole of the provinces, a plebiscite of Muslims only, and no conditions.

Rajaji was denounced across the Congress as a defeatist and a traitor to the cause of unity, and he left the party for a period.

Why he matters

Look at what the formula proposed and then look at what happened in 1947. Contiguous Muslim majority districts, a boundary commission, and separation. It is very close to what India actually got, three years later, except that in 1944 it would have come with negotiation, a plebiscite and time to plan.

Rajaji's position was that the demand for Pakistan could not be defeated by refusing to discuss it, and that a negotiated separation on India's terms was better than a forced one on somebody else's. He was called a traitor for saying it in 1944 and the Congress adopted the substance of it in 1947.

PROFILE TWELVE

Master Tara Singh and Baldev Singh

The Sikh leadership. This is the shortest profile in this part and it should be the longest, and the reason for that is itself the point.

The position the Sikhs were in

The Sikhs were about 13 to 14 percent of Punjab's population. They were a majority in no district. Their holy places, their most productive canal colony lands and a large part of their community lay on both sides of any line that could be drawn through Punjab.

They therefore had the worst hand of anyone at the table. They could not have a state because they had no majority anywhere. They could not stay in a Muslim majority Pakistan without becoming a minority in a state defined by another religion. And any partition of Punjab would cut their community in half whatever the boundary.

What their leaders did

- **Master Tara Singh**, leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal, opposed Pakistan absolutely. On 3 March 1947, outside the Punjab Assembly in Lahore, he drew his kirpan on the steps in a public act of defiance against the Pakistan demand. The Rawalpindi massacres followed within days. Whether his gesture was a cause, a trigger or a coincidence is argued about to this day, and I do not think it can be settled.
- **Baldev Singh** represented the Sikhs in the negotiations and at the 2 June 1947 meeting where the partition plan was accepted. He accepted it, on the basis that a divided Punjab kept the largest possible number of Sikhs and Sikh shrines in India. He had almost nothing to bargain with.
- A proposal for a separate Sikh state, sometimes called Azad Punjab or Khalistan in various formulations, was raised by Akali leaders in the 1940s and was never seriously entertained by the British, the Congress or the League. There was no territory in which it was demographically possible.

What actually happened to them

Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, and Panja Sahib went to Pakistan. So did Lahore, the capital of Ranjit Singh's kingdom. Virtually the entire Sikh population of west Punjab, some two to two and a half million people, was uprooted. Proportionately, the Sikhs suffered more displacement than any other community in India, and the violence in east and west Punjab in which Sikh jathas were both victims and perpetrators was the worst in the subcontinent.

THE VERDICT ON HOW THE SIKHS WERE TREATED

EVERY OTHER PARTY FAILED THEM

The British designed a settlement on a two community model in a province where three communities lived. The Muslim League offered guarantees it had no mechanism to enforce and every incentive to abandon. The Congress used Sikh opposition to Pakistan when it was useful and did not secure anything specific for them in return. And their own leadership had no realistic option to pursue and knew it.

The Sikhs lost their shrines, their capital, their best land and their homes, and they were the only major community that received nothing at all from Partition. Any account of 1947 that does not say this plainly is incomplete.

PROFILE THIRTEEN

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan

1890 to 1988. The Frontier Gandhi. The core idea: that nonviolence was not a Hindu doctrine but a universal one, and that he could prove it among the Pashtuns.

What he built

The **Khudai Khidmatgars**, the Servants of God, a nonviolent movement of about a hundred thousand volunteers in the North West Frontier Province, in a Pashtun society with a deep tradition of the feud and the gun. They wore red shirts, took a vow of nonviolence, and were shot down without retaliating, most notoriously at Qissa Khwani Bazaar in Peshawar in April 1930.

It is one of the most remarkable political achievements of the twentieth century and it is almost entirely forgotten. An overwhelmingly Muslim province, allied to the Congress, voted Congress in 1937 and again in 1946, and did it on a platform of nonviolence.

What happened to him

When the Congress Working Committee accepted the partition plan on 3 June 1947 without consulting the Frontier leadership, he said the sentence for which he is remembered.

"You have thrown us to the wolves."

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan to the Congress leadership, after the Working Committee accepted the partition plan, 3 June 1947

The Frontier was then given a referendum with only two options, India or Pakistan. Independence, or a Pashtunistan, was not on the ballot, although the Khudai Khidmatgars had formally demanded it in the Bannu Resolution of June 1947. Believing that contesting a communal referendum would set Pashtun against Pashtun, he boycotted it. The Muslim League won it on a low turnout.

He spent much of the rest of his life in Pakistani prisons, some fifteen years in total, having already spent years in British ones. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna by India in 1987. He died in 1988 in Peshawar under house arrest, and was buried, by his own wish, in Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Both sides in the Afghan war observed a ceasefire so that his funeral could pass.

The verdict

Nothing in this book is a clearer case of a man being right and losing anyway. He proved that nonviolence was not culturally Hindu, he delivered a Muslim majority province to the Congress twice in free elections, and the Congress accepted a plan that handed his province away without asking him.

PROFILE FOURTEEN

Four Voices Usually Left Out

Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, 1879 to 1973

The leader of the Self Respect Movement in the Tamil country, and a radical opponent of caste and of Brahmin dominance. His position on Partition is the one nobody expects: he **supported Jinnah's demand**, and congratulated him. His reason had nothing to do with Islam. He held that the real threat to south India was north Indian Brahminical domination through a strong Delhi, and that anything that broke up a centralising Hindu majority state was good for Dravidians. He also raised a demand for a separate Dravida Nadu.

He is a reminder that opposition to a unitary Indian nation came from more directions than one, and that Muslim separatism was not the only separatism on the table in the 1940s.

Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, 1905 to 1982

The Lion of Kashmir, leader of the National Conference. He renamed his party from the Muslim Conference to the National Conference in 1939 precisely to make it non communal, and his politics were about land reform and the removal of the Dogra maharaja rather than about religion. He opposed Jinnah's two nation theory, and Jinnah in turn had little time for him.

In 1947 he supported accession to India rather than to Pakistan, on secular and land reform grounds, and his support was what made the accession politically real. He was Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir from 1948, and was dismissed and imprisoned by the Indian government in 1953, spending much of the next twenty years in detention. His story is where the argument about Article 370 begins, and it belongs to Part 12.

A. K. Fazlul Huq, 1873 to 1962

The Bengali peasant leader who won Bengal in 1937 on land reform, moved the Lahore Resolution in March 1940, formed a coalition with the Hindu Mahasabha in December 1941, was expelled from the Muslim League, and later served as chief minister of East Pakistan and was dismissed. His career is the single best refutation of the idea that the politics of this period ran on fixed religious loyalties.

Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, 1892 to 1942

Premier of Punjab and leader of the Unionist Party, the cross community alliance of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh landholders that kept Punjab out of communal politics through the 1930s. He signed a pact with Jinnah in 1937 that gave the League a formal presence in Punjab, and then spent the rest of his life trying to limit what he had conceded, insisting in the Punjab Assembly in 1941 that he did not support a Pakistan in which Muslims would rule and others would be subjects.

He died in December 1942 at fifty. The Unionist Party did not survive him, and its collapse in 1946 and 1947 is what opened Punjab to the League and to the killing. It is worth asking what Punjab would have looked like had he lived another five years, and nobody can answer it.

THE SCORECARD

Who Opposed, Who Accepted, and When

The single most useful page in this book. Everything above, compressed.

LEADER	POSITION ON PARTITION	WHEN IT CHANGED
Muhammad Ali Jinnah	Demanded it	From March 1940. But accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan for a united India in June 1946.
Liaquat Ali Khan	Demanded it	Consistently with Jinnah.
Dr B. R. Ambedkar	Accepted it in principle, with conditions	In print from 1940, provided there was a planned and complete transfer of populations. The condition was never met.
C. Rajagopalachari	Proposed a negotiated version	1944, and was denounced for it. The Congress adopted the substance in 1947.
Periyar	Supported the demand	From the early 1940s, for anti centralist and anti Brahmin reasons.
Sardar Patel	Opposed, then accepted first among Congress leaders	Winter 1946 to early 1947.
Jawaharlal Nehru	Opposed, then accepted	March to April 1947.
The Congress Working Committee	Demanded the partition of Punjab	8 March 1947 , before accepting the partition of India.
Baldev Singh, for the Sikhs	Accepted, with no alternative available	2 June 1947.
Mahatma Gandhi	Opposed to the end, then asked the AICC to accept the resolution	14 June 1947. He never said it was right.
Maulana Azad	Opposed to the last day	Never accepted it as right.
Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan	Opposed, and was not consulted	Never accepted it. "You have thrown us to the wolves."
V. D. Savarkar	Opposed absolutely	Never accepted it. Also stated the two nations position in 1937.
M. S. Golwalkar	Opposed absolutely	Never accepted it.
Syama Prasad Mookerjee	Opposed the partition of India, demanded the partition of Bengal	Campaigned successfully in 1947 for West Bengal to remain in India.

LEADER	POSITION ON PARTITION	WHEN IT CHANGED
Master Tara Singh	Opposed Pakistan absolutely	Never accepted it, and had no alternative to offer.
Sheikh Abdullah	Rejected the two nation theory	Chose India in 1947.

WHAT THE SCORECARD SHOWS

ALMOST NOBODY WANTED IT, AND IT HAPPENED ANYWAY

Of the seventeen figures above, exactly three wanted a partition of India as a positive good: Jinnah, Liaquat and, for entirely different reasons, Periyar. Two more, Ambedkar and Rajagopalachari, accepted the logic of separation and proposed ways to do it in an orderly manner, and both were ignored.

Everybody else on this list opposed it, including every Hindu nationalist leader, every Sikh leader, the Frontier leadership, and the entire Congress high command until the last few months.

That is the most important single fact in this book. Partition was not the triumph of a majority position. It was what a room full of people who mostly opposed it agreed to, because by mid 1947 each of them had concluded, separately, that the alternatives in front of them were worse. Understanding how that happens is more useful than finding somebody to blame for it.

CLOSING

Word List and Sources

Word list

Akhand Bharat	Undivided India. The stated goal of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS.
Hindutva	Savarkar's 1923 definition of Hindu political identity, based on India being both fatherland and holy land.
C. R. Formula	Rajagopalachari's 1944 proposal for a plebiscite in contiguous Muslim majority districts to decide separation.
Khudai Khidmatgars	The Servants of God, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's nonviolent movement of about a hundred thousand Pashtun volunteers.
Bannu Resolution	The June 1947 demand by Frontier leaders for an independent Pashtunistan option, refused by the British.
Shiromani Akali Dal	The principal Sikh political party, led in this period by Master Tara Singh.
Jatha	An organised band. In 1947 the term was used for the armed groups operating in Punjab.
Unionist Party	The cross community landholders' party that governed Punjab from 1923 to 1946.
Self Respect Movement	Periyar's movement in the Tamil country against caste and Brahmin dominance.
National Conference	Sheikh Abdullah's party in Kashmir, renamed from the Muslim Conference in 1939 to make it non communal.

Sources used in Part 9

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- V. D. Savarkar, presidential addresses to the Hindu Mahasabha, Ahmedabad 1937 and Kanpur 1942, and *Essentials of Hindutva*, 1923.
- Judgment in the Gandhi murder trial, 1949, and the report of the Kapur Commission, 1969.
- M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1939, and the published scholarship on its disputed authorship.
- The C. R. Formula, 1944, and the record of the Gandhi and Jinnah talks of September 1944.

- Records of the Congress Working Committee, 3 June 1947, and contemporary accounts of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's response.
- The Bannu Resolution, June 1947, and the record of the North West Frontier Province referendum.
- Punjab Legislative Assembly proceedings, including Sikandar Hyat Khan's statement of 1941 on the kind of Pakistan he would not support.
- Accounts of the united sovereign Bengal proposal of April and May 1947 by Suhrawardy and Sarat Chandra Bose, and of the campaign against it.
- Selected works and collected writings of Nehru, Patel and Gandhi for the positions and dates given.

COMING NEXT

Part 10: Why Pakistan Became Muslim Only and India Did Not. The population tables for 1941, 1951 and today, for India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Why most Muslims stayed in India and how many. Jinnah's speech of 11 August 1947 and why Pakistan did not follow it. The Objectives Resolution of 1949 and how Pakistan became an Islamic Republic. What happened to Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Ahmadis and Shias. 1971 and what Bangladesh proves about the two nation theory. The Nehru Liaquat Pact and why Syama Prasad Mookerjee resigned over it. And what the numbers actually prove, as against what people claim they prove.

Part 9 of a twelve part series. Researched, written and compiled by Lovepreet Singh.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART TEN OF TWELVE

Why Pakistan Became Muslim Only and India Did Not

*The population tables, the laws, 1971,
and what the numbers actually prove*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the question I started with, and it is the one I have been most careful about.

The comparison between India's minorities and Pakistan's is used constantly, by everybody, and almost always dishonestly. One side uses it to prove Hindu civilisational superiority. The other side denies the figures altogether or changes the subject. Both are avoiding the same thing, which is arithmetic.

So this part is built around numbers, from official censuses, with the dates and the sources given. The numbers are stark and I have not softened them. Pakistan's and Bangladesh's non Muslim minorities have shrunk enormously. India's Muslim minority has grown. That is simply true.

And then I have done something the people who quote those figures almost never do, which is to ask what they actually prove. Some of the decline is persecution. Some of it is the 1947 migration itself. Some of it is emigration and fertility. Separating those is the difference between an argument and a slogan, and I have tried to separate them.

I have also included, in the same detail and with the same seriousness, **India's own failures**: the killings of 1947 in Delhi, Hyderabad in 1948, 1984, 1992, 2002, and what the Sachar Committee found about Muslim representation. A book that lists Pakistan's crimes and skips India's is propaganda, however accurate its footnotes.

The honest answer to the question in the title is structural rather than moral, and I think it is more interesting than either side's version.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART TEN

CHAPTER 1	The numbers, laid out
CHAPTER 2	Why most Muslims stayed in India
CHAPTER 3	Why the west emptied and the east drained slowly
CHAPTER 4	Jinnah's speech of 11 August 1947
CHAPTER 5	How Pakistan became an Islamic Republic
CHAPTER 6	The narrowing definition of who belongs
CHAPTER 7	1971: what Bangladesh proves
CHAPTER 8	India's different road, and India's own failures
CHAPTER 9	What the numbers prove and what they do not
CLOSING	How many times India was partitioned, timeline, sources

CHAPTER ONE

The Numbers, Laid Out

Everything in this part rests on these tables, so read them slowly. All figures are from official censuses unless marked otherwise.

Before Partition

In British India in 1941, Muslims were roughly **24 percent** of the population. The regions that became Pakistan had substantial non Muslim populations: west Punjab and Sindh had large Hindu and Sikh communities, and east Bengal was roughly **28 percent** Hindu.

After Partition, and today

COUNTRY	MINORITY MEASURED	1951	LATEST CENSUS
Pakistan (west wing, then and now)	Hindus	1.6 percent	2.17 percent in 2023, about 5.2 million people
East Pakistan, then Bangladesh	Hindus	22 percent	7.95 percent in 2022, about 13.1 million people
India	Muslims	9.8 percent	14.2 percent in 2011, about 172 million people, and roughly 15 percent today

And the intermediate figures for Bangladesh, because the shape of the decline matters more than the endpoints:

YEAR	HINDUS AS A SHARE OF EAST BENGAL OR BANGLADESH
1941	About 28 percent
1951	22 percent
1974, after the war of independence	13.5 percent
1991	About 15 percent by some series, with the general trend downward
2011	8.5 percent
2022	7.95 percent

IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

Pakistan's Hindu population fell from about one in six of its combined territory to almost nothing in the west and about one in thirteen in the east.

India's Muslim population rose from about one in ten to about one in seven.

Those are the facts. The rest of this part is about what caused them, and Chapter 9 is about what they do and do not prove.

CHAPTER TWO

Why Most Muslims Stayed in India

In 1951, India had about 35 million Muslims. This is the single largest fact about Partition that the two nation theory cannot explain.

Start with the arithmetic of the Lahore Resolution

Go back to Part 4 and the resolution of 23 March 1940. It grouped Muslim majority areas in the north west and the east into independent states. It said nothing at all about the Muslims of the United Provinces, Bihar, Bombay, Madras, Hyderabad and the Central Provinces.

Those Muslims were roughly a third of undivided India's Muslim population, and they were the political heartland of the Muslim League. The party that demanded Pakistan drew its strongest support, its leadership and its intellectual life from provinces that could never be part of it.

Nobody ever answered that question. Not in 1940, not in 1946, not in 1947.

The five reasons they stayed

1. **Geography.** A Muslim weaver in Lucknow or a farmer in Bihar lived a thousand miles from either wing of Pakistan. There was no land to go to, no house waiting, and no exchange arrangement of the kind Punjab experienced. In Punjab the two populations swapped, brutally and almost completely, because they faced each other across a new line. In the Gangetic plain there was no line to be on the wrong side of.
2. **Poverty.** Migration costs money. The people who could arrange transport, sell property and start again in Karachi were the ones with resources. Most Indian Muslims did not have them.
3. **Land and trade.** A cultivator with an acre, an artisan with a workshop, a shopkeeper with a name in his locality: these are not portable. The whole basis of a family's living was fixed in a place.
4. **Choice.** This should not be underrated. A very large number of Indian Muslims did not accept the two nation theory and never had. The Frontier voted Congress in 1937 and 1946. The Jamiat Ulama i Hind, a major body of Islamic scholars, opposed Pakistan from within religious argument, as Azad did. Millions of people simply did not agree that they were a separate nation.
5. **The elite left and the poor stayed.** This is the cruel part. A large part of the League's leadership class in the United Provinces migrated, becoming the *muhajirs* of Karachi. They had built a movement on the argument that Indian Muslims could not be safe in a Hindu majority India, they secured a country, they moved to it, and they left behind the ordinary people they had mobilised, now a minority of ten percent in a country whose partition their leaders had demanded, and blamed for it by their neighbours.

VERDICT

THE TWO NATION THEORY FAILED ITS OWN TEST IN 1947

If Hindus and Muslims were two nations that could not live together, then in 1947 the Muslim nation should have moved to its state. About a third of it could not and did not, and it is still there, and it is now larger than the population of Pakistan.

India today has one of the largest Muslim populations of any country on earth. That fact, standing in plain sight, is the permanent refutation of the proposition on which Pakistan was founded.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ONES WHO DID GO

The muhajirs who migrated from the United Provinces, Bihar and Bombay to Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh were the most committed believers in Pakistan. They were also, within a generation, treated as outsiders by Sindhis and Punjabis, excluded from quotas, and by the 1980s had formed their own ethnic party which fought a long and violent conflict with the state.

And the Bengali speaking Muslims who had moved from Bihar to East Pakistan, the so called stranded Pakistanis, were left after 1971 in camps in Bangladesh, unwanted by Pakistan and distrusted in Bangladesh, where some of their descendants remain.

The lesson is uncomfortable for the theory. A shared religion did not dissolve language, region and ethnicity. It never had.

CHAPTER THREE

Why the West Emptied and the East Drained Slowly

The two wings of Pakistan lost their Hindus in completely different ways, and the difference explains almost everything.

West Pakistan: an exchange, completed in months

In Punjab and Sindh the non Muslim population went from substantial to almost nothing within about a year. In west Punjab this was not a gradual erosion. It was a violent, organised, near total exchange, mirrored by an equally violent expulsion of Muslims from east Punjab.

By 1951, Hindus were **1.6 percent** of West Pakistan. There was nothing left to decline from. This is why Pakistan's Hindu percentage has been broadly flat, and even slightly risen, ever since. The catastrophe there happened in 1947 and was complete.

The Hindus who remain in Pakistan are overwhelmingly in Sindh, and a large proportion are from Dalit and tribal communities, above all the Meghwar, Bheel and Kolhi, who were the poorest and had least ability to move. That fact matters for Chapter 6.

East Pakistan: a slow squeeze over fifty years

East Bengal was different in every way. Hindus were 22 percent of the population in 1951, some ten million people. They were mostly rural, tied to land, spread across the whole province rather than concentrated on a border. There was no equivalent of the Punjab exchange, and no possibility of expelling a fifth of the population at once.

What happened instead was a squeeze applied over decades, and the mechanism is worth understanding precisely because it is not dramatic.

WHEN	WHAT
1950	Riots in East Bengal and reprisals in West Bengal, producing large refugee flows in both directions and the Nehru Liaquat Pact of April 1950.
1964	Riots following the theft of a relic in Kashmir, with violence in Khulna and Dhaka and a further exodus.
1965 onward	The Enemy Property Act , passed during the war with India, allowed the state to seize the property of anyone declared an enemy. In practice it was applied to Hindus who had left or were said to have left. It was renamed the Vested Property Act in Bangladesh and was not repealed for decades. Scholars have estimated that a very large share of Hindu families in Bangladesh lost land under it. This is the single most effective instrument in the whole story, because it is legal, quiet and permanent.
1971	The war, which targeted Hindus specifically. See Chapter 7.

WHEN	WHAT
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After 1971	Continued emigration, periodic violence around elections, and the reversal of the secular constitution when Islam was made the state religion in 1988.
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IN THE SIMPLEST WORDS

In the west, the Hindus were driven out in one terrible year and the question was settled by 1948.

In the east, nobody drove out ten million people at once. A law was passed that let the state take their land, riots came every few years, a war targeted them in 1971, and each decade a few percent more left. Nobody has to organise a massacre if the law will do the work slowly.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jinnah's Speech of 11 August 1947

Three days before Pakistan existed, its founder told its Constituent Assembly something that contradicted the basis on which he had obtained it.

"You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State... you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State."

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Karachi, 11 August 1947

What to make of it

This speech is used by everybody. Pakistani liberals cite it as the founder's true intention. Indian critics cite it as proof of hypocrisy. Pakistani religious parties have historically wished it away.

Here is what can be said with confidence.

- **The speech is real** and the text is not in doubt. Claims that it was suppressed or censored in the Pakistani press circulate widely, and the evidence for a deliberate suppression is contested. I could not establish it to my own satisfaction and I flag it as disputed rather than asserting it.
- **It is consistent with the man's whole life until about 1937.** The Jinnah of Profile Two, the Lucknow Pact and the opposition to Khilafat, would have written exactly this. It is the Jinnah of 1940 to 1946 who is the departure, not this.
- **And it was incompatible with the argument that had created the country.** If religion has nothing to do with the business of the state, then there was no reason to divide a state on religion. Jinnah never reconciled those two positions, and after 11 September 1948 he was not there to try.

Why it did not survive

Two deaths and one logic.

Jinnah died on **11 September 1948**, thirteen months after independence. Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated in October 1951. Within four years Pakistan had lost both the men who could have defined it, and it had no equivalent of the Indian Constituent Assembly's long, argumentative, three year process.

But the deeper reason is structural. A state created on the proposition that Muslims are a nation must eventually answer the question: which Muslims, and defined by whom? Once you accept

that religion determines nationality, you have handed the state the job of deciding what the religion is. Everything in the next chapter follows from that.

CHAPTER FIVE

How Pakistan Became an Islamic Republic

It was not one decision. It was a ratchet, turning in one direction for forty years, and each turn was made easier by the last.

YEAR	STEP	WHAT IT DID
March 1949	The Objectives Resolution	Declared that sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah, that authority is a sacred trust exercised by the people within limits prescribed by Him, and that Muslims should be enabled to order their lives according to Islam. It also promised adequate provision for minorities to profess their religions freely. The non Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly opposed it and voted against. They warned, in the debates, that a state built on this premise could not treat them as equals. They were right.
1953	Anti Ahmadi agitation in Punjab	Violent agitation demanding that Ahmadis be declared non Muslim. Martial law was imposed in Lahore. The official Munir Report that followed is a remarkable document: it found that no two religious scholars questioned could agree on a definition of who is a Muslim, and warned against letting the state enter that question.
1956	First Constitution	Pakistan became the Islamic Republic of Pakistan . The head of state had to be a Muslim.
1962 and 1973	Later constitutions	The Islamic provisions were retained and extended. The 1973 constitution required both the President and the Prime Minister to be Muslims and declared Islam the state religion.
1974	Second Amendment	Ahmadis were declared non Muslim by constitutional amendment. This was done not by a general or a mullah but by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, an elected, western educated, avowedly socialist Prime Minister, under pressure from religious parties. That is the important detail: the ratchet turned even in the hands of people who did not believe in it.
1979	Hudood Ordinances	General Zia ul Haq's Islamisation programme introduced criminal punishments derived from religious law, with severe consequences for women in particular in cases of rape and adultery.
1984	Ordinance XX	Made it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims, to call their places of worship mosques, to use the Muslim call to prayer, or to preach their faith. A community was made criminal for describing itself.
1985 to 2002	Separate electorates	Non Muslims could vote only for reserved non Muslim seats, which removed any incentive for mainstream politicians to seek their votes. This is the 1909 device from Part 2, reappearing in the country that had demanded it, now used against the minorities it originally protected.

YEAR	STEP	WHAT IT DID
1986 and 1990s	Blasphemy law	Section 295C of the Penal Code was amended in 1986 to raise the penalty for blasphemy, and the death penalty became mandatory following a judicial ruling in the early 1990s. Accusation alone has repeatedly led to mob killing, and the law is used disproportionately against Christians, Ahmadis and Shias, and also against Sunni Muslims in property and personal disputes.

THE MECHANISM, STATED PLAINLY

Look at the sequence. First the state declares that it exists for a religion. Then it has to define that religion in law. Then it has to decide who qualifies. Then it has to punish those who claim to qualify and do not. Then it has to punish those who insult what it has defined.

Each step follows logically from the one before. That is what makes it a ratchet rather than a series of accidents. And it is why the Munir Report of 1954, which asked religious scholars to define a Muslim and found no two who agreed, is the most prophetic document in Pakistan's history.

CHAPTER SIX

The Narrowing Definition of Who Belongs

What the ratchet did to each community in turn.

Hindus

Almost entirely gone from Punjab and the north west in 1947. About 2.17 percent of Pakistan today, concentrated in Sindh, and disproportionately from Dalit and tribal communities who were too poor to leave in 1947. The most persistent documented abuse is the abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Hindu girls in interior Sindh, reported for years by Pakistan's own Human Rights Commission and raised repeatedly in its courts and press. Temple attacks recur, including major incidents in recent decades.

Sikhs

Effectively eliminated from west Punjab in 1947, despite Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, being there. A small community remains, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and has suffered targeted killings during the militancy of the last two decades. The Kartarpur corridor opened in 2019 is a genuine and welcome exception in an otherwise bleak record.

Christians

Roughly 1.3 to 1.6 percent of Pakistan, largely descended from Dalit converts in Punjab, and heavily concentrated in the poorest occupations, including sanitation work that is frequently advertised as reserved for non Muslims. They are prosecuted under the blasphemy law far out of proportion to their numbers. Entire Christian neighbourhoods have been burned by mobs following blasphemy allegations, in Gojra in 2009, in Joseph Colony in Lahore in 2013 and in Jaranwala in 2023.

Ahmadis

The clearest case, because it is entirely a matter of law rather than of mob action alone. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslim. In 1974 the constitution declared that they are not. In 1984 it became a crime for them to say otherwise. They are excluded from the electoral roll as Muslims, so participating in elections requires them to accept a declaration they consider blasphemous, and most therefore do not vote. In 2010 coordinated attacks on two Ahmadi places of worship in Lahore killed more than eighty people.

Shias and Hazaras

Shias are perhaps fifteen to twenty percent of Pakistan's Muslims, and are therefore not a small community. Sectarian militant groups have killed thousands of them since the 1980s. The Hazara

Shia community of Quetta has been attacked repeatedly, in bombings that killed people in the hundreds, and now lives in effectively enclosed neighbourhoods.

VERDICT ON CHAPTER SIX

TRUE, AND THE DIRECTION IS THE POINT

The pattern is not that Pakistan turned on Hindus. It is that the definition of who belongs kept narrowing, and each narrowing created a new outsider. First non Muslims. Then Ahmadis, who considered themselves Muslim. Then Shias. Then anyone accused of blasphemy, including Sunnis.

This is the strongest available argument against founding a state on religion, and it is an argument that applies to any country, including India. A state that defines belonging by faith cannot stop at the first boundary, because there is always a stricter definition available and always somebody willing to demand it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1971: What Bangladesh Proves

Twenty four years after Pakistan was founded on the proposition that religion makes a nation, the majority of its people left it. They were Muslims.

What East Pakistan actually was

Understand the position first, because it is usually forgotten. East Pakistan contained **more than half** of Pakistan's entire population. It was the majority, not a province. And it was treated as a colony by the western wing.

- **Language.** In 1948 Jinnah declared in Dhaka that Urdu alone would be the state language of Pakistan. Bengali was the mother tongue of the majority of Pakistanis. The language movement that followed produced deaths when police fired on student demonstrators in Dhaka on **21 February 1952**, a date now observed worldwide as International Mother Language Day. Bengali was eventually recognised in 1956.
- **Money.** Jute from East Bengal was one of Pakistan's largest export earners, and the foreign exchange it produced was overwhelmingly spent in the west. Development expenditure, industry and infrastructure went west.
- **Power.** The civil service and above all the army were dominated by west Pakistanis. Bengalis were a small fraction of the officer corps, a legacy of the martial races doctrine from Part 1, which had classified them as unwarlike.
- **Politics.** The capital, the presidency and every centre of decision were in the west.

The election that broke it

In December 1970 Pakistan held its first genuinely free general election. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and campaigning on autonomy for the east, won **160 of the 162 seats in East Pakistan and an absolute majority in the 300 seat national assembly**.

It had won the right to form the government of Pakistan. The assembly session was postponed indefinitely and power was not transferred.

Operation Searchlight and the war

On the night of **25 March 1971** the Pakistan Army launched Operation Searchlight in Dhaka and across the east, beginning with the university, the police lines and the Hindu quarters of the city. The war that followed lasted until 16 December 1971, when the Pakistani forces surrendered in Dhaka after Indian intervention.

The casualty figures are among the most contested in modern history and I am going to give the range honestly rather than pick one.

FIGURE	STATUS
Three million killed	The official Bangladeshi figure, used in the country's national memory. Most independent demographers regard it as too high.
300,000 to 500,000 killed	The range given by several independent scholarly estimates.
Higher scholarly estimates up to one and a half million	Also exist. There is no agreed figure and the gap between the estimates is enormous.
200,000 to 400,000 women raped	The commonly cited range. Bangladesh gave the survivors the official title <i>Birangona</i> , meaning brave woman, an unusual public recognition.
About 10 million refugees into India	Not seriously disputed. A very large majority of them were Hindus, which is why the Bangladesh Hindu percentage falls from 22 to 13.5 between 1951 and 1974.

What is not disputed by serious historians is that Hindus were **specifically targeted**. Army directives and eyewitness accounts describe the marking of Hindu homes and neighbourhoods, and Hindus were a hugely disproportionate share of both the dead and the refugees.

VERDICT ON WHAT 1971 PROVES ABOUT THE TWO NATION THEORY

THE THEORY WAS DISPROVED BY THE PEOPLE WHO HAD VOTED FOR IT MOST STRONGLY

Bengal was where the Muslim League built its mass base. Bengal produced the Lahore Resolution, moved by Fazlul Huq. East Bengal voted for Pakistan more decisively than anywhere else.

Twenty four years later those same people fought a war to leave, and the fighting was between Muslims on both sides. Shared religion did not make one nation out of two populations separated by a thousand miles, a different language, a different economy and a wholly unequal share of power.

What this does not prove: that Partition itself was avoidable, or that the grievances of 1940 were imaginary. A theory can be wrong and the fear behind it still real.

What it does prove: that religion alone is not sufficient to hold a state together, and that language, region, economics and political fairness matter at least as much. Everyone in South Asia should have learned that in 1971, and the argument in every one of these countries suggests that not everyone has.

AND A FACT THAT CUTS THE OTHER WAY

Bangladesh's first constitution in 1972 was explicitly **secular**. Secularism was one of its four founding principles, and religious political parties were banned.

That did not last. After Mujib's assassination in 1975, the secularism clause was removed in 1977, and in 1988 Islam was declared the state religion. The Hindu share continued to fall through both periods.

So a country can start secular and ratchet the other way. Nothing in this part should be read as saying that constitutions are self enforcing. They are not. They are only as strong as the number of people willing to defend them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

India's Different Road, and India's Own Failures

Now the other half of the comparison, and I am going to give India the same scrutiny.

The decision that was not obvious

In 1947 India had every excuse to become a Hindu state. It had just been divided on the explicit claim that Muslims were a separate nation. Its capital was full of refugees who had lost everything. Its most beloved leader was murdered in January 1948 by a Hindu nationalist. A Hindu state would have been popular.

It did not do it, and that was a choice made by identifiable people against real pressure. Syama Prasad Mookerjee argued for a different course. Sections of the Congress itself agreed with him. The Hindu Mahasabha demanded it.

What India adopted instead, in the Constitution that came into force on 26 January 1950, was this:

- **No state religion.** Nothing corresponding to the Objectives Resolution.
- **Article 14 and 15:** equality before the law and no discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- **Articles 25 to 28:** freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion. Note the word propagation, which Pakistan criminalised for Ahmadis in 1984.
- **Articles 29 and 30:** the right of minorities to conserve their culture and to establish and administer their own educational institutions.
- **Article 17:** untouchability abolished.
- **Universal adult franchise from the first general election in 1951 and 1952,** at a stroke, in a country with about eighteen percent literacy. No property qualification, no separate electorates, no religious test for any office.

And the President of the Constituent Assembly's drafting committee was a Dalit, and its most prominent Muslim members sat as Indians rather than as a communal bloc.

Now the failures, in the same detail

A book that lists Pakistan's record and skips India's would be worthless. So here it is.

- **Delhi, September 1947.** Thousands of Muslims were killed in the capital in the weeks after independence, and large parts of the city's Muslim population were driven into camps at Purana Qila and Humayun's Tomb. Nehru personally intervened in the streets. Gandhi's last fast in January 1948 was about exactly this.
- **Hyderabad, September 1948.** After the Indian army's police action against the Nizam's state, widespread reprisal killings of Muslims took place in the Marathwada and Telangana districts. The government's own inquiry, the **Sundarlal Report**, estimated deaths in a range that has been read as between roughly 27,000 and 40,000. **The report was not made public until 2013.** Sixty five years of suppression is itself part of the record.

- **1984.** After Indira Gandhi's assassination, organised mobs killed Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere. Official figures give around 2,700 dead in Delhi alone and higher totals nationally. Prosecutions took over three decades and remain incomplete.
- **1992 and 1993.** The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the riots that followed in Bombay and elsewhere, with about 900 dead in Bombay according to the Srikrishna Commission, whose findings on police conduct were damning and were largely not acted upon.
- **2002.** Gujarat. Official figures give around 1,044 dead, with unofficial estimates around 2,000, the great majority Muslim.
- **Representation.** The Sachar Committee reported in 2006 that Indian Muslims were substantially below the national average on most development indicators and were severely under represented in government employment, the police, the higher civil services and the security forces, at levels far below their share of population.
- **And the recurring pattern** that convictions for communal violence are rare, that police reform is not undertaken, and that the political cost of anti minority violence has often been negative rather than positive.

THE HONEST COMPARISON

STRUCTURAL, NOT MORAL

What is true: India's Muslim minority grew from 9.8 to over 14 percent and is now one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Pakistan's and Bangladesh's non Muslim minorities collapsed. No amount of context changes those numbers.

What is also true: India has had recurring mass communal violence, its worst episodes have gone substantially unpunished, it suppressed its own inquiry into Hyderabad for sixty five years, and its Muslim citizens are measurably behind and measurably under represented.

The reason for the difference is not that Indians are better people. The Punjab of 1947 shows what Indians of every faith were capable of. The difference is that India built a state whose founding document does not permit a religious test, gave everyone the vote at once, and put minority rights in a constitution enforceable by courts, while Pakistan built a state whose founding document required it to decide who was a proper believer.

And that is a warning rather than a boast. Structures can be changed. Bangladesh started secular in 1972 and stopped being so by 1988. The protection Indian minorities have is not Indian virtue. It is a document and the institutions that enforce it, and those are only as strong as the people who defend them.

The Nehru Liaquat Pact and Mookerjee's resignation

One episode brings all of this together.

In early 1950, violence in East Bengal and reprisals in West Bengal produced an enormous new refugee flow in both directions. On **8 April 1950** Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan signed the Delhi Pact, usually called the Nehru Liaquat Pact. Each government undertook to protect its minorities, to allow refugees to return and dispose of their property, to recover abducted women and looted

property, and to refuse recognition to forced conversions. Each also agreed to set up minority commissions.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee resigned from Nehru's cabinet in April 1950 over it. His argument was precise and it is worth stating properly.

- The pact was reciprocal in form but not in substance. India's Muslim minority was about ten percent and stable. East Pakistan's Hindu minority was over twenty percent and falling. Equal promises between unequal situations favour the party already achieving its aim.
- There was no enforcement mechanism. Nothing would happen if Pakistan simply did not comply.
- India was, in his view, taking on an obligation to its own minority while receiving in return a promise it could not enforce.

Nehru's position was that the alternative to a pact was war, that a war in 1950 would be catastrophic for both refugee populations, and that a flawed agreement which stopped the immediate killing was better than none.

WHO WAS RIGHT?

NEHRU ON THE SHORT TERM, MOOKERJEE ON THE LONG TERM

Nehru was right that the immediate crisis needed stopping and that the pact stopped it. The refugee flow slowed sharply and a war was avoided.

Mookerjee was right that a reciprocal guarantee between a stable minority and a shrinking one is not reciprocal, that there was no enforcement, and that the East Bengal trend would continue. It did, for the next seventy years, and the numbers in Chapter 1 are the proof.

He left and founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, which is the ancestor of a party that governs India today. This resignation is therefore not a footnote. It is one of the origin points of modern Indian politics.

CHAPTER NINE

What the Numbers Prove and What They Do Not

This chapter exists because the tables in Chapter 1 are used to prove things they do not prove, by people who have never examined them.

What they do prove

- Non Muslim minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh have declined enormously since 1947, and the decline is continuing in Bangladesh.
- India's Muslim minority has grown in both absolute numbers and share.
- Pakistan and Bangladesh have legal and constitutional structures that formally disadvantage non Muslims, and in Pakistan's case criminalise a minority for describing itself. India does not.

What they do not prove, and this is where the arguments usually cheat

1. The west Pakistan figure is not a story of slow persecution

Hindus were already down to 1.6 percent by **1951**. The collapse happened in 1947 and 1948, in a violent two way exchange in which Muslims were expelled from east Punjab on a comparable scale. It is not evidence about how Pakistan treated a minority over seventy years, because after 1948 there was barely a minority left there to treat. The percentage has actually risen slightly since.

The genuine long term persecution story is **Bangladesh**, where 22 percent became 7.95 percent over seventy years, and Sindh, where a community remains and is under pressure. Using the west Pakistan figure for the persecution argument is using the wrong number.

2. Not all of the Bangladesh decline is persecution

The decline has at least four causes and honest analysis separates them: the 1947 migration itself, the 1971 war and its ten million refugees, continuing emigration under legal and social pressure including the Vested Property Act, and a lower birth rate among Bangladeshi Hindus than among Bangladeshi Muslims. Persecution is a major cause. It is not the only one, and anyone who presents the whole decline as massacre is overstating a case that is strong enough without it.

3. India's Muslim growth is not evidence of anything sinister

India's Muslim share rose from 9.8 to 14.2 percent over sixty years. The reasons are demographic and well studied: higher fertility associated with lower income, lower female education and lower access to health services, exactly the pattern found in poorer communities of every religion everywhere in the world. Indian Muslim fertility has been falling faster than Hindu fertility in recent decades and the gap is closing.

The claim that Muslims will outnumber Hindus in India is **false**. Projections by demographers, including Pew, put the Muslim share at roughly 18 to 19 percent by 2050, with Hindus remaining around 77 percent. There is no arithmetic on which the majority changes.

4. And migration cuts both ways

India's Muslim population also includes people who arrived. Any comparison of 1951 to 2011 has to acknowledge both the returning refugees of 1948 to 1951 and later migration from Bangladesh, which is politically contentious and hard to measure.

THE HONEST VERSION OF THE ARGUMENT

THE STRONG CLAIM IS TRUE. THE POPULAR VERSION OF IT IS SLOPPY.

Defensible: a state founded on religious identity narrowed its definition of belonging repeatedly and its minorities collapsed, while a state founded on constitutional equality retained and grew its largest minority. That is a real finding about **constitutions**, and it is the most important political lesson of the twentieth century in South Asia.

Not defensible: using the west Pakistan number as proof of long term persecution, presenting the whole Bangladesh decline as massacre, treating India's Muslim growth as a demographic threat, or concluding from any of it that one people is morally superior to another.

And the fair rejoinder that Indian readers should sit with: India's record has kept its minority alive and legally equal. It has not kept them safe in 1947, 1984, 1992 or 2002, and it has not made them equal in fact. Both halves of that sentence are true, and only quoting the first half is exactly the selective method this book was written against.

CLOSING

How Many Times Was India Partitioned?

The question I was asked at the start of this project, and now it can be answered properly.

Three times, and several near misses

WHEN	WHAT	OUTCOME
1905	Bengal divided by Curzon into a Muslim majority east and a Hindu majority west	Reversed in 1911 by mass agitation. The rehearsal for everything, and the subject of Part 2.
1947	India divided into India and Pakistan, with Punjab and Bengal each cut in two	Permanent. Up to two million dead, twelve to twenty million displaced.
1971	Pakistan divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh	Permanent. The two nation theory disproved by the people who had voted for it hardest.

And the near misses, each of which could have added another line to that table: **Hyderabad**, whose Nizam wanted independence and was taken by force in September 1948; **Junagadh**, whose ruler acceded to Pakistan against a Hindu majority population and was reversed by plebiscite; **Travancore**, which declared independence in June 1947 and reversed within weeks; **Kashmir**, which acceded to India in October 1947 and has been divided by a ceasefire line ever since; and a **united sovereign Bengal**, proposed in April 1947 by Suhrawardy and Sarat Bose and defeated by the campaign described in Part 9.

The last question: why did language work where religion did not?

Here is the puzzle that ought to be more famous. India refused to divide on religion in 1947 and then, in 1956, deliberately redrew almost every one of its internal boundaries on **language**, creating Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and the rest, and later splitting Bombay and Punjab.

It was an enormous and risky reorganisation, and at the time many people including Nehru feared it would break the country. It did the opposite. India is more stable for having done it.

Why did that work when the religious division destroyed everything? Because a linguistic identity can be accommodated *inside* a state. A Tamil can have Tamil Nadu, Tamil schools, Tamil administration and Tamil courts and still be an Indian, because language does not make a competing claim about who has the right to rule. Religion, once made the basis of nationhood, does. It says this state exists for us, which necessarily means it does not exist for you.

Federalism can absorb language. It cannot absorb a claim about which god the state belongs to.

That is the answer to the question this part set out to answer. Pakistan became Muslim only not because Muslims are intolerant, but because it built a state on a religious claim and then had to keep deciding who qualified. India stayed plural not because Hindus are tolerant, but because it

built a state on a constitutional claim that did not require anyone to qualify. The people were the same people. The structures were different, and the structures decided.

Timeline for Part 10

DATE	EVENT
11 August 1947	Jinnah's address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan.
1948	Jinnah declares in Dhaka that Urdu alone will be the state language. Jinnah dies on 11 September 1948.
September 1948	Indian police action in Hyderabad and the reprisal killings later documented in the Sundarlal Report.
March 1949	Objectives Resolution passed. Non Muslim members vote against.
26 January 1950	The Constitution of India comes into force. No state religion, universal adult franchise, enforceable minority rights.
February to March 1950	Riots in East and West Bengal. Huge refugee flows.
8 April 1950	Nehru Liaquat Pact signed. Syama Prasad Mookerjee resigns from the cabinet in April 1950.
1951	Bharatiya Jana Sangh founded. Census: Hindus 1.6 percent of West Pakistan, 22 percent of East Pakistan; Muslims 9.8 percent of India.
21 February 1952	Police fire on Bengali language demonstrators in Dhaka.
1953	Anti Ahmadi agitation in Punjab. Martial law in Lahore. The Munir Report follows.
1956	Pakistan becomes the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. India reorganises its states on linguistic lines.
1964	Riots in East Pakistan and further Hindu exodus.
1965	Enemy Property Act in Pakistan, later the Vested Property Act in Bangladesh.
December 1970	Awami League wins 160 of 162 East Pakistan seats and an absolute national majority. Power is not transferred.
25 March 1971	Operation Searchlight begins.
16 December 1971	Surrender at Dhaka. Bangladesh independent.
1972	Bangladesh adopts a secular constitution.
1974	Second Amendment in Pakistan declares Ahmadis non Muslim.

DATE	EVENT
1977 to 1988	Zia ul Haq's Islamisation. Hudood Ordinances 1979, Ordinance XX 1984, blasphemy amendment 1986.
1988	Islam declared the state religion of Bangladesh.
1984, 1992 to 1993, 2002	Mass communal violence in India: Delhi, Bombay, Gujarat.
2006	Sachar Committee reports on the condition of Indian Muslims.
2013	The Sundarlal Report on Hyderabad 1948 is made public after sixty five years.
2022 and 2023	Censuses: Hindus 7.95 percent of Bangladesh, 2.17 percent of Pakistan.

Word list

Objectives Resolution	The 1949 resolution of Pakistan's Constituent Assembly declaring sovereignty to belong to Allah and setting the framework for an Islamic state.
Muhajir	Migrant. In Pakistan, the Urdu speaking Muslims who moved from north India in 1947 and their descendants.
Enemy Property Act	The 1965 Pakistani law allowing seizure of property of those declared enemies, applied to Hindus, and continued in Bangladesh as the Vested Property Act.
Ahmadi	A member of the Ahmadiyya movement, which considers itself Muslim and was declared non Muslim by Pakistan's constitution in 1974.
Ordinance XX	The 1984 Pakistani law criminalising Ahmadis for describing themselves as Muslims or their places of worship as mosques.
Section 295C	The blasphemy provision of the Pakistan Penal Code, amended in 1986, carrying the death penalty.
Operation Searchlight	The Pakistan Army operation launched in East Pakistan on 25 March 1971.
Birangona	Brave woman. The official title given by Bangladesh to women raped during the 1971 war.
Sundarlal Report	The Indian government inquiry into the killings in Hyderabad after the police action of 1948, suppressed until 2013.
Sachar Committee	The Indian government committee that reported in 2006 on the social, economic and educational condition of Indian Muslims.

Sources used in Part 10

- Census of Pakistan, 1951 and 2023, and Census of India, 1951 and 2011, for the religious composition figures.
- Census of East Bengal and East Pakistan 1951, Bangladesh censuses of 1974, 1991, 2011 and 2022.
- Pew Research Center, projections of population growth and religious composition in India.
- Muhammad Ali Jinnah, address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 11 August 1947, full text.
- Objectives Resolution of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, March 1949, and the debates including the objections of the non Muslim members.
- Report of the Court of Inquiry into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953, known as the Munir Report, 1954.
- Constitution of Pakistan, Second Amendment 1974; Ordinance XX of 1984; Criminal Law Amendment Act 1986 and Section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code.
- Enemy Property Act 1965 and the Vested Property Act of Bangladesh, and the scholarly literature on dispossession under them.
- Records of the 1970 Pakistani general election and of the events of 1971, together with the range of scholarly casualty estimates.
- Constitution of India, 1950, Articles 14, 15, 17, 25 to 30.
- Nehru Liaquat Pact, 8 April 1950, full text, and Syama Prasad Mookerjee's resignation correspondence of April 1950.
- Report of the Sachar Committee, 2006.
- The Sundarlal Report on Hyderabad, released in 2013, and the Srikrishna Commission report on the Bombay riots of 1992 and 1993.
- Human Rights Commission of Pakistan annual reports on the condition of religious minorities.

COMING NEXT

Part 11: Gandhi the Man. Every personal charge, examined with the same method. The brahmacharya experiments and Manu, in full and without euphemism. The claim that he refused penicillin for his dying wife and took quinine himself. The statements telling Hindus to die without anger, with the exact words, dates and audiences. Was he pro Muslim, tested case by case. Was he a hypocrite about money, family and his own sons. What he said about caste, early and late. And his assassination, with Godse's court statement examined point by point.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART ELEVEN OF TWELVE

Gandhi the Man

*Every personal charge examined: the experiments, the penicillin,
the quotations, the money, the caste, and the murder*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This part is about a man's private life, and I want to be clear about why it is in a history book at all.

It is here because these charges are made constantly, because they are used to settle political arguments, and because most people repeating them have never checked a single one. If the charges are true, readers deserve to know. If they are false, readers deserve to know that too. Either way, the checking has to be done by somebody.

I have applied one rule throughout. For every charge I ask three separate questions: **is the factual claim true, what is the full context, and does it change the political verdict.** Those are genuinely different questions and running them together is how both sides cheat. A thing can be true and still not mean what it is being used to mean. A thing can be shocking and still be irrelevant to whether a man's politics were sound. And a thing can be defended by his admirers and still be indefensible.

Some of what follows is uncomfortable to read. One chapter deals with conduct towards young women that I think was wrong, and I have said so plainly rather than reaching for the word experiment and moving on. Another chapter demolishes an accusation that millions of people believe. I have not tried to balance the score. The chapters land where the evidence put them.

The last chapter is about his murder, and about the statement his killer read in court. I have examined that statement claim by claim, in the same way I have examined every other claim in this book.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART ELEVEN

CHAPTER 1	The experiments with Manu and the women of the ashram
CHAPTER 2	Kasturba, penicillin, and the quinine six weeks later
CHAPTER 3	"Let Hindus die": what he actually said, and to whom
CHAPTER 4	Was he pro Muslim? Ten cases, tested
CHAPTER 5	Money, family, and the hypocrisy charge
CHAPTER 6	Caste: what he said early and what he said late
CHAPTER 7	What he got right that his critics never mention
CHAPTER 8	30 January 1948, and Godse's statement examined
CLOSING	Timeline, sources, what comes next

CHAPTER ONE

The Experiments With Manu and the Women of the Ashram

I have put this chapter first because it is the charge on which I have changed my own mind while researching, and because it is the one where his defenders are weakest.

What brahmacharya meant to him

Gandhi took a vow of brahmacharya in 1906, at thirty seven, while still in South Africa. In ordinary usage the word means celibacy. He meant something wider and stranger: he broke it into *brahma*, meaning truth or God, and *charya*, meaning conduct, so brahmacharya was for him the whole conduct that leads to God, of which sexual abstinence was one part.

Crucially, he did not think abstinence was achieved by avoiding temptation. He thought it was achieved only when temptation had no power at all. A man who was pure only because he stayed away from women was not pure, he was merely absent. So the proof of the vow required the presence of the thing renounced.

That is the logic. Whether one finds it profound or a rationalisation, it is what he said, consistently, for forty years.

What he actually did

The practice went through phases. Women, including Sushila Nayar, who was his doctor, slept near him or shared his bed at various points from the 1930s. The phase that caused the crisis was in **1946 and 1947**, during and after the Noakhali walk described in Part 8.

In that period he had **Manu Gandhi**, the granddaughter of a cousin and therefore his grand niece, then about eighteen, sleep naked beside him, and he slept naked or nearly so himself. He described this openly as a yajna, a sacrifice or test, of his own purity and of hers. He did not conceal it. He wrote and spoke about it, discussed it with colleagues, and referred to it in his prayer meetings.

His stated reason in that specific period is important and is often left out. He had concluded that the massacres of 1946 and 1947 were continuing because his own nonviolence was imperfect, and that the imperfection lay in some residue of impurity in himself. If he could establish that he was completely pure, his moral force would be complete and the killing would stop. That is the reasoning. It is the reasoning of a man of seventy seven under unbearable strain, watching a country burn and holding himself responsible for it.

Who objected, and what happened to them

This is the part that settles the argument, in my view, because the objections did not come from his enemies. They came from the people closest to him, at the time, and he lost several of them over it.

- **R. P. Parasuram**, a young man from Kerala who had been his personal secretary and typist for two years, wrote him a sixteen page letter setting out his distress at what he had seen, and listed five conditions concerning Gandhi's physical conduct with women in the ashram on which he would be willing to continue. On **2 January 1947** Gandhi replied that he could not concede the demands, that since such was his opinion and there was a conflict of ideals, Parasuram was at liberty to leave him that day. Parasuram left.
- **Nirmal Kumar Bose**, the anthropologist who served as his Bengali interpreter in Noakhali, objected in writing. His argument was that Gandhi should not have Manu sleeping in his bed until he had explained the practice publicly and the public had been brought to understand it, and he was troubled by the effect on the women involved. He left, and later wrote about the whole episode in *My Days with Gandhi*, published in 1953.
- **Two editors of *Harijan***, his own weekly paper, resigned rather than print the material about the experiments.
- **Sardar Patel and Acharya Kripalani**, among the most senior Congress leaders, criticised him over it.

He did not stop. He did not concede a single one of Parasuram's five conditions.

Testing the charge

Was there sexual intent?

There is no evidence of it, and the manner in which he conducted the practice, openly, publicly, in a household full of people, discussed in letters and prayer meetings, is not the behaviour of a man concealing sexual conduct. Nobody involved ever alleged intercourse. On that specific accusation the answer is that it is not supported.

Was it an abuse of power?

Yes, and here is why I think that conclusion is unavoidable.

Consider the position of an eighteen year old grand niece in his household in 1946. He was the most revered man in India, the head of her extended family, her guardian in a violent district far from home, and the person on whose approval her standing entirely depended. He framed participation as a spiritual test that she could pass or fail. Refusal was not a neutral option available to her.

That is a power differential so total that consent cannot be meaningfully given. And this is not a modern standard imposed retrospectively. His own secretary said so in writing in 1946, his own interpreter said so, his own editors resigned, and two of the most senior men in his party told him to stop. He was told, clearly, by the people who loved him most, and he refused.

Does it change the political verdict?

Not directly, and I want to be careful here in both directions. A man's conduct towards women in his household does not determine whether his analysis of separate electorates was correct. Nothing in this chapter alters the findings of Parts 3 to 10.

But it does bear on one thing, and it is the thing he cared about most. His entire political method rested on the claim that a man who had perfected himself acquired moral authority over others. This episode shows that claim operating in the way such claims always eventually operate: as a justification for doing what he wished to do, over the objections of people with less power than him, on the ground that his purposes were higher than their comfort.

VERDICT ON THE BRAHMACHARYA EXPERIMENTS**TRUE, AND THE DEFENCE DOES NOT WORK**

TRUE that from 1946 he had young women, including his eighteen year old grand niece Manu, sleep naked beside him, that he described it as a test of his purity, and that he continued after being asked to stop by his own secretary, his own interpreter, the editors of his own paper and senior colleagues.

NOT SUPPORTED that there was sexual contact or sexual intent. No participant ever alleged it.

MY CONCLUSION: the absence of sexual intent does not settle it. The power imbalance was absolute, refusal was not a real option for the women concerned, and he was told so at the time by people who had no motive except concern for him. Calling it an experiment is a way of not looking at it. It was wrong, it was wrong by the standards of his own household in 1946, and his refusal to concede a single point when challenged is the least defensible thing in his personal record.

And it should be said in the same breath that he documented it himself. A man who leaves ninety eight volumes of collected works including the material that damns him is not the same as a man who hides. That is not a defence. It is a fact about why we know.

CHAPTER TWO

Kasturba, Penicillin, and the Quinine Six Weeks Later

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Gandhi's wife was dying and the doctors said penicillin would save her. He refused to allow it because it was a foreign medicine, and she died. Six weeks later he caught malaria and immediately took quinine, a foreign medicine, to save himself. He killed his wife with his principles and then abandoned those principles for his own life."

What actually happened

Kasturba Gandhi had been detained with her husband at the Aga Khan Palace in Poona since August 1942, after the Quit India arrests. She was in her seventies and her health broke down there. She had bronchitis, then pneumonia, then a series of heart attacks in December 1943 and January 1944, and her kidneys were failing.

Their son **Devdas** obtained penicillin from Calcutta. Penicillin in February 1944 was an extremely new drug, barely available anywhere in the world, and its use was still largely experimental outside military hospitals.

Gandhi refused to allow it. She died on **22 February 1944**.

About six weeks later Gandhi contracted **malaria**. He resisted quinine for around three weeks while his doctors pressed him. He then agreed to take it and recovered.

The parts the accusation leaves out

Four things, and they do not all point the same way.

- **His stated objection was to the injection, not to the medicine.** His long standing position was against injections specifically, as an invasion of the body, and this was consistent with a lifetime of published views on medicine.
- **The doctors themselves were doubtful.** Accounts indicate that her physicians did not consider penicillin likely to help, because what was killing her was kidney failure, which penicillin does not treat. If that is right, the premise of the accusation, that a drug would have saved her and was withheld, is not established.
- **He asked her.** His account, and those of others present, is that Kasturba herself did not wish to be given injections in her final days and wanted to die in her husband's presence rather than be treated experimentally. Whether an exhausted, dying woman of seventy four in the presence of an overwhelming husband can be said to have chosen freely is a fair question, and readers may weigh it as they did Chapter 1.
- **He resisted the quinine too, for three weeks.** The image of a man refusing medicine for his wife and then instantly taking it for himself is not accurate. He fought his doctors about his own treatment as well, and lost.

And the part that survives

Being fair does not mean acquitting him. Two things stand.

He did repeatedly accept modern medicine for himself. He had an appendectomy performed by a British surgeon in Poona in January 1924. He took quinine in 1944. He accepted treatment on other occasions. Whatever the doctrinal distinction about injections, a man whose principles bend for his own appendix and his own malaria and did not bend for his wife's pneumonia has a question to answer.

And the power question from Chapter 1 applies here too. The decision was taken by him, about her body, in a household where his word was final.

VERDICT ON THE PENICILLIN CLAIM

MOSTLY TRUE ON THE FACTS, MISLEADING IN ITS FORCE

TRUE that penicillin was obtained, that he refused it, that she died, and that he took quinine for himself about six weeks later.

MISLEADING that a cure was available and withheld. Penicillin in February 1944 was new and scarce, and her doctors are reported to have doubted it would help against kidney failure. The claim that it would have saved her is an assumption, not a finding.

MISLEADING that he switched principles instantly for himself. He resisted quinine for about three weeks before yielding.

WHAT SURVIVES: he did accept surgery and drugs for himself on several occasions across his life. The inconsistency is real, even if the specific accusation of killing her with dogma is not sustainable. And the deeper charge, that he made a final decision about another person's body in a relationship of absolute authority, is the same charge as Chapter 1 and it stands.

CHAPTER THREE

"Let Hindus Die": What He Actually Said, and to Whom

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Gandhi told Hindus that if Muslims came to kill them they should die without anger and without resisting. He asked an entire community to submit to slaughter for the sake of his principles."

Did he say things like that?

Yes. He said, many times and to many audiences, that the nonviolent way to face a murderous mob was to die without hatred rather than to kill. In the aftermath of the 1946 and 1947 killings he said versions of it to Hindus in Bengal and Bihar. The sentiment is genuinely his and nobody needs to fabricate it.

Now apply Rule 3: who else did he say it to?

This is where the accusation collapses, because he said the same thing to every group he ever addressed, including groups facing far worse than Indian Hindus faced.

WHEN	TO WHOM	WHAT HE ADVISED
1938	German Jews, in <i>Harijan</i>	That they should offer nonviolent resistance to the Nazi state, and that suffering voluntarily undergone would rouse the conscience of the world. This is the most criticised thing he ever wrote. Martin Buber and Judah Magnes replied to him publicly and devastatingly, and he was on any reasonable view catastrophically wrong.
1940	The British, facing German invasion	That they should lay down arms and let Hitler occupy their island rather than fight, offering nonviolent non cooperation instead. He published this while Britain was expecting invasion.
1946 and 1947	Hindus and Muslims in Bengal and Bihar	That they should face death without killing.
Throughout	Himself	He faced mobs personally in Noakhali, Calcutta and Delhi, unarmed and unguarded, and was killed doing it.

A doctrine that a man applies to Jews facing Hitler, to Britons facing invasion, to Muslims, to Hindus and to his own body is not a communal instruction to one community. It is a universal position, and it is a position for which he can fairly be called a fanatic and unfairly be called a partisan.

The quotation that is always omitted

And then there is this, which is systematically left out of the accusation and which he repeated for nearly thirty years.

"I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence... I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour."

Gandhi, "The Doctrine of the Sword", *Young India*, 11 August 1920

He held that position consistently. He said that a man who ran away and left his family to be butchered was worse than a man who fought and killed. He praised those who died defending others. His hierarchy was: nonviolent courage first, violent courage second, cowardice last and worst.

Anybody quoting him telling Hindus to die without anger, while omitting a position he printed in 1920 and repeated for the rest of his life, is not reporting his views. They are constructing them.

VERDICT ON "HE TOLD HINDUS TO LET THEMSELVES BE KILLED"

TRUE IN THE WORDS, FALSE IN THE MEANING

TRUE that he advised facing death without hatred rather than killing, including to Hindus in 1946 and 1947.

FALSE that this was advice given to Hindus specifically or because they were Hindus. He gave identical advice to German Jews in 1938 and to the British in 1940, and applied it to himself until he was shot.

FALSE BY OMISSION in almost every version I have seen, because he also held, in print from 1920 onward, that where the only choice is between cowardice and violence, violence is better.

What is fairly criticised: that his doctrine was impossible for ordinary people, that his 1938 advice to Jews was appalling and was demolished at the time by Jewish thinkers, and that a principle which cannot be followed by a frightened family in a burning village is not much use to them. Those are serious criticisms. "He was on the other side" is not one of them.

CHAPTER FOUR

Was He Pro Muslim? Ten Cases, Tested

The way to answer this is not with adjectives. It is with a list of occasions and a column for which way each one cuts.

CASE	WHAT HE DID	CUTS WHICH WAY
Khilafat, 1919 to 1924	Took the Congress into alliance with a Muslim religious cause and asked nothing in return.	Supports the charge
Malabar, 1921	Praised the rebels' courage and religious sincerity while they were killing and forcibly converting Hindus, and told Hindus they were partly to blame. Part 3 examined this fully and found the charge of imbalance sustained.	Supports the charge
Kohat, 1924	Fasted for twenty one days over the killing and expulsion of Hindus and Sikhs from Kohat, in the house of Maulana Mohammad Ali.	Against the charge
Noakhali, November 1946 to March 1947	At seventy seven, walked barefoot through about forty seven villages for four months, for Hindu victims of Muslim violence, staying in the district when nobody else would.	Strongly against the charge
Bihar, March 1947	Went from Noakhali to Bihar and told Hindus that what they had done was worse than Noakhali because they claimed to be avenging it. Threatened to fast to death if it did not stop.	Supports the charge, as a pattern
Calcutta, August and September 1947	Spent independence day in a poor Muslim locality and fasted to stop the killing. The city stayed quiet. Mountbatten called him a one man boundary force.	Neutral to against, since it protected both
Delhi, September 1947 onwards	Visited Muslim refugee camps at Purana Qila and worked to stop the expulsion of Muslims from the capital.	Supports the charge
The 55 crore, January 1948	Supported payment of a contractual obligation to Pakistan. As Part 8 showed, his fast's stated conditions were about Delhi, and the payment was released during it rather than being its object.	Supports the charge, partly
Hindu refugees, 1947 and 1948	Told Hindu and Sikh refugees in Delhi that they should return to Pakistan when conditions allowed, rather than occupy Muslim homes. To people who had lost everything this was unbearable.	Supports the charge
Temple entry and untouchability	Spent decades attacking a Hindu practice, at physical risk, including a bomb thrown at his car in Poona in 1934.	Shows the method, not a loyalty

Reading the table

A pattern is visible and it should be conceded honestly. Across thirty years, Gandhi was **consistently harder on Hindus than on Muslims**. He criticised Hindu conduct in language he did not use about Muslim conduct. When he asked for restraint, he asked it more often and more sharply of his own community.

Now the question is what that pattern means, and there are two available explanations.

The first is loyalty: that he favoured Muslims, for reasons of vote banks, sentiment or a desire to be seen as above communal politics.

The second is method, and it is what he said himself, repeatedly, from the 1920s onward. His position was that a reformer's authority runs only over his own community, that he was a Hindu speaking to Hindus, and that a man who lectures another community while excusing his own is not a moral teacher but a politician. On this reading the asymmetry is not favouritism, it is the deliberate discipline of always attacking your own side first.

VERDICT ON "GANDHI WAS PRO MUSLIM"

HALF TRUE, AND THE USUAL WORD FOR IT IS WRONG

TRUE that there is a consistent asymmetry, that he applied harsher standards to Hindus, and that this had real costs which Hindu refugees in 1947 paid.

FALSE that he was indifferent to Hindu suffering. Kohat in 1924, Noakhali in 1946 and 1947 and Bihar's condemnation are not the record of a man who did not care. Nobody spent four months walking through Noakhali on behalf of Muslims.

The accurate statement: it was a method rather than a loyalty. Whether the method was right is a genuine argument. A man who is always hardest on his own people will be trusted by everybody else and resented by his own, and that is exactly what happened, and it is why he was killed by a Hindu and not by a Muslim.

CHAPTER FIVE

Money, Family, and the Hypocrisy Charge

Who paid for him

Gandhi's ashrams, newspapers, travel and campaigns were funded by wealthy Indian industrialists, above all **G. D. Birla**, **Jamnalal Bajaj** and **Ambalal Sarabhai**. He stayed in Birla's houses, including Birla House in Delhi where he was killed. Sarojini Naidu's famous joke, that it cost a great deal of money to keep Gandhi living in poverty, was made to his face and he enjoyed it.

Verdict: true, and he never denied it. What has to be added is the other half. He took no salary, held no office after 1934, owned almost nothing at his death, and did not enrich his family. His sons received no positions. He refused to let Congress funds be used for his family. The money funded a movement rather than a man, and by the standards of political leadership anywhere in the world this is an unusually clean record.

The fair criticism is different and sharper: **the dependence shaped his politics.** His attachment to the doctrine of trusteeship, the idea that the rich should hold wealth in trust for society rather than be dispossessed of it, is a convenient doctrine for a man funded by mill owners. Whether he believed it independently or arrived at it comfortably is unanswerable, and it is what the socialists in his own party, and Bhagat Singh, said at the time.

Harilal

This is the hardest chapter of his personal life and I am not going to soften it.

Harilal Gandhi was his eldest son, born 1888. As a young man he wanted the English education and the professional career his father had had. Gandhi refused to arrange it, on the principle that he would not use his position to advantage his own children when other young men had no such advantage, and sent another young man abroad instead. Harilal never recovered from it.

His life afterwards was one of alcoholism, debt, business failure and estrangement. He converted to Islam in 1936, taking the name Abdullah, in what was widely understood as an act aimed at his father, and returned to Hinduism afterwards. He appeared at his father's meetings drunk. He died in June 1948, four months after his father, in a Bombay hospital, of tuberculosis, alone.

Verdict: the principle Gandhi applied was defensible in the abstract and was applied by a man who had the power to choose the principle and a boy who did not. He was, on the evidence of his own letters, a rigid and demanding father who could not separate his public standard from his private duty. Kasturba's letters to Harilal are far warmer than his. This is a real failure and no political achievement cancels it.

The lifestyle charges

- **Third class travel:** he travelled third class, and at various periods a compartment was reserved so that he could work and rest. Both facts are true. Presenting either alone is dishonest.
- **The ashrams:** he imposed a severe regime at Sabarmati and Sevagram, on himself as much as on others, and the discipline was hard on families, on children and above all on women, who carried most of the labour.
- **Kasturba:** his own autobiography is the most damaging source on his early treatment of her, including his account of ordering her out of the house over cleaning a latrine, and of taking his vow of celibacy in 1906 which ended their marital life. He wrote it himself, as a confession, which is why we know.

CHAPTER SIX

Caste: What He Said Early and What He Said Late

The charge is that he defended the caste system. The answer is that he did, and then stopped, and the change took twenty five years.

PERIOD	POSITION
1920s	Defended <i>varnashrama</i> , the fourfold order, as a natural law of division of labour, while condemning untouchability as a later corruption and a sin. He also, at this stage, defended restrictions on inter dining and inter marriage.
1932 to 1934	The Poona Pact and its aftermath. Founded the Harijan Sevak Sangh, launched <i>Harijan</i> , and toured for nine months against untouchability, during which he faced organised orthodox Hindu opposition and a bomb was thrown at his car in Poona.
Late 1930s	Moved to the position that varna meant only equal duties and equal status, which empties the traditional idea of its content, and increasingly refused to defend hereditary occupation.
1940s	Declared that he would attend no wedding that was not between a so called caste Hindu and a so called untouchable. He now regarded inter caste marriage as the test.

VERDICT ON CASTE

HE CHANGED ENORMOUSLY, AND IT CAME LATE AND UNDER PRESSURE

TRUE that he defended the varna order in the 1920s, and that this was incoherent, as Ambedkar told him: you cannot condemn the fruit while protecting the tree.

ALSO TRUE that he moved further than almost any leader of his generation, at real physical risk, and ended in a position on inter caste marriage that most of his own supporters did not share.

And it must be said that the pressure which moved him was Ambedkar's. The credit for the change belongs substantially to the man who forced it, and Ambedkar never received it in Gandhi's lifetime.

CHAPTER SEVEN

What He Got Right That His Critics Never Mention

Short, because Parts 3 and 7 did most of this work. But it belongs here, next to the charges.

- **He built the organisation that received power in 1947.** Part 7 showed why this mattered more than anything else, and why India got out without an anti colonial war when Indonesia, Indochina, Algeria and Kenya did not.
- **He made untouchability a national political issue** when no other political body in India had done so, however inadequate his answer was.
- **He brought women into public life** on a scale no other movement in the world matched at that time. The picketing campaigns of 1930 and 1932 put hundreds of thousands of women into political action, and it changed what was possible for the next generation.
- **He never held office, never took a salary, and left no property.** After leading a national movement for thirty years, and being offered the government of a country, he took nothing.
- **Noakhali and Calcutta.** At seventy seven and seventy eight, unarmed and unguarded, he walked into districts where people were being killed for their religion and stayed. Calcutta, which everyone expected to be the worst place in India in August 1947, stayed quiet because of it.
- **And he was killed for protecting Muslims.** Whatever else is argued about him, the reason a Hindu nationalist shot him in January 1948 was that he had just spent five days fasting to protect Muslims in Delhi. That is the last fact of his life and no account of him is complete without it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

30 January 1948, and Godse's Statement Examined

What happened

On 30 January 1948, at about 5.17 in the evening, Gandhi walked to his prayer meeting in the grounds of Birla House in Delhi. **Nathuram Vinayak Godse**, a thirty seven year old from Poona, editor of a Marathi newspaper and formerly associated with the Hindu Mahasabha and, in his earlier years, the RSS, stepped forward, bowed, and fired three shots into his chest and abdomen at point blank range. Gandhi died within minutes.

It was the second attempt. On **20 January 1948** a bomb had been set off at the same prayer ground by Madanlal Pahwa, a Punjabi refugee, who was caught. The information he gave was not acted upon effectively, and the security failure over those ten days remains one of the worst in Indian history.

The conspirators tried were Godse, **Narayan Apte**, Gopal Godse, Vishnu Karkare, Madanlal Pahwa, Shankar Kistayya, Dattatraya Parchure and, as an accused, **V. D. Savarkar**. Digambar Badge turned approver. Godse and Apte were hanged on 15 November 1949. **Savarkar was acquitted for want of corroborating evidence**. The Kapur Commission, reporting in 1969 with material not available at the trial, took a considerably harsher view of the contacts between Savarkar and the conspirators, but he was tried and acquitted and this book will not describe him as convicted of something he was not convicted of.

Godse's statement

Permitted to argue his own case, Godse read a ninety two page handwritten statement to the court on 8 November 1948, and a further statement to the Punjab High Court on appeal in May 1949. It has circulated ever since. Here are its main claims, tested by the method used throughout this book.

GODSE'S CLAIM	TEST
That Gandhi fasted to force the government to pay Rs 55 crore to Pakistan.	MISLEADING. Part 8 established the record. The payment was a contractual obligation under the partition financial settlement, of which Rs 20 crore had already been paid. Nehru and Patel had agreed to the settlement and Mountbatten held that withholding it was dishonourable. The fast's stated conditions were about the safety of Muslims in Delhi and the restoration of mosques, and it ended on 18 January on those undertakings, three days after the payment was announced.

GODSE'S CLAIM	TEST
That Gandhi was responsible for Partition.	FALSE. Part 8 established the order. Patel accepted Partition first, in the winter of 1946 to 1947. The Congress Working Committee demanded the partition of Punjab on 8 March 1947. Nehru followed. Gandhi opposed it for seven years, proposed handing the government to Jinnah rather than divide the country, boycotted the independence celebrations, and asked the AICC to accept the resolution only in June 1947 after he had lost the argument inside his own party.
That Gandhi always appeased Muslims and never spoke for Hindus.	HALF TRUE AS A PATTERN, FALSE AS STATED. Chapter 4 conceded the asymmetry. But Godse's version requires the erasure of the twenty one day fast over Kohat in 1924, the four month Noakhali walk in 1946 and 1947 for Hindu victims, and the condemnation of Muslim conduct in Bihar and elsewhere.
That Gandhi's fasts were coercion dressed as morality.	A FAIR CRITICISM, AND THIS BOOK AGREES WITH IT. Part 4 reached the same conclusion about the fast of September 1932 against Ambedkar. A criticism being fair does not make a killing justified, and Godse's own statement moves without pause from the criticism to the killing.
That Gandhi dominated the Congress undemocratically.	HALF TRUE. Part 5 found that Bose was squeezed out by exactly such means in 1939, and Part 9 recorded the 1946 presidency going to Nehru over twelve provincial committees' choice of Patel. This is a real criticism of the man's methods inside his party.

The reasoning at the centre of it

Notice what the table shows. Godse's statement is not pure invention. Two of its five main political claims are criticisms this book has independently reached and endorsed. That is precisely why the statement has had the afterlife it has: it is a mixture of accurate criticism and factual distortion, and the accurate parts carry the false parts.

The two central factual claims, on the 55 crore and on responsibility for Partition, are the ones on which the whole justification rests, and both fail. A man was shot for a fast whose object he had misdescribed and for a Partition he had opposed.

VERDICT ON GODSE'S STATEMENT**REAL CRITICISMS WRAPPED AROUND TWO FALSE FOUNDATIONS**

What is fair in it: that Gandhi used fasts coercively and that he dominated the Congress by means that were not democratic. This book agrees with both, on evidence gathered independently in Parts 4, 5 and 9.

What is false in it: the two claims that carry the justification. Gandhi did not fast to force money to Pakistan, and Gandhi did not cause Partition. Both are refuted by the documentary record set out in Part 8.

And the point that no amount of political argument touches: a seventy eight year old unarmed man walking to a prayer meeting was shot three times in the chest by a man who had made his own private judgement. Political criticism, however sharp and however partly justified, is not a defence for that, and a country that cannot say so plainly has not understood what happened to it.

THE LAST FACT

The fast that Godse gave as his final provocation was the fast of 13 to 18 January 1948, whose stated conditions were the safety and free movement of Muslims in Delhi, the return of their homes and the restoration of their mosques.

The last political act of Gandhi's life was to nearly starve himself to death so that Muslims could live in the capital of India. Twelve days later a Hindu shot him for it.

Whatever any reader concludes about the man from the eight chapters above, that sequence is the record.

CLOSING

The Ledger on the Man

Eight chapters, and the honest summary is that he does not come out of them as a saint or as a fraud.

The charges that stand: the conduct towards Manu and the women of the ashram, which was an abuse of position and was called so at the time by his own staff. The coercive use of fasting, above all against Ambedkar in 1932. His treatment of Harilal. The consistent asymmetry in how he judged Hindus and Muslims, whatever its motive. And a self assurance about his own purity that made him unable to hear people who told him he was wrong.

The charges that fail: that he killed his wife with dogma. That he told Hindus to submit because they were Hindus. That he caused Partition. That he fasted for Pakistan's money. That he enriched himself. That he did nothing for the freedom of India.

And the thing that should be said last, because this part has been hard on him and fairness requires it: almost everything damaging in this chapter is known because he wrote it down himself. The experiments, the treatment of Kasturba, the failures with Harilal, the doubts, the mistakes. Ninety eight volumes, published, indexed and free to read. There is no other leader of the twentieth century who left his prosecutors so much material and so little cover.

Part 12 closes the book. Every blunder examined with the question of who actually decided it. What would probably have happened without Gandhi, without Jinnah and without the war. A guide to the fake quotations that circulate about all of these people, and how to check any quotation yourself in two minutes. And one master table with a verdict on every claim tested across the twelve parts.

Timeline for Part 11

DATE	EVENT
1906	Takes the vow of brahmacharya in South Africa, at thirty seven.
11 August 1920	"The Doctrine of the Sword" in <i>Young India</i> : violence is preferable to cowardice.
January 1924	Appendectomy performed by a British surgeon at Poona.
September 1924	Twenty one day fast over the Kohat killings.
September 1932	Fast against the Communal Award. The Poona Pact. See Part 4.
1933 to 1934	Nine month anti untouchability tour. Bomb thrown at his car in Poona.
1936	Harilal converts to Islam. Gandhi publishes his advice to German Jews in 1938.
1940	Advises the British to meet German invasion with nonviolence.

DATE	EVENT
August 1942	Detained with Kasturba at the Aga Khan Palace, Poona.
22 February 1944	Kasturba dies. Penicillin obtained by Devdas had been refused.
April 1944	Gandhi contracts malaria, resists quinine for about three weeks, then takes it.
November 1946 to March 1947	Noakhali. The brahmacharya experiments with Manu Gandhi.
2 January 1947	Refuses Parasuram's five conditions. Parasuram leaves. Nirmal Kumar Bose also leaves.
August and September 1947	Calcutta. The one man boundary force.
13 to 18 January 1948	Last fast, in Delhi, for the safety of Muslims and the restoration of mosques.
20 January 1948	Bomb attempt at Birla House by Madanlal Pahwa.
30 January 1948	Assassinated by Nathuram Godse at Birla House, Delhi.
June 1948	Harilal Gandhi dies in Bombay.
8 November 1948	Godse reads his ninety two page statement to the court.
February 1949	Judgment. Savarkar acquitted. Godse and Apte sentenced to death.
15 November 1949	Godse and Apte hanged.
1969	Kapur Commission reports.

Sources used in Part 11

- *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ninety eight volumes, for his own accounts of the brahmacharya vow, the experiments, Kasturba's illness, and his correspondence with Parasuram of 2 January 1947.
- Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, 1953, available on the Internet Archive.
- R. P. Parasuram's letter to Gandhi, December 1946, and Gandhi's reply.
- The diaries of Manu Gandhi, held by the National Archives of India and published in translation.
- Gandhi, *An Autobiography, or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, for the early treatment of Kasturba and the 1906 vow.
- Gandhi, "The Doctrine of the Sword", *Young India*, 11 August 1920.
- Gandhi's articles on the German Jews, *Harijan*, 1938, and the published replies of Martin Buber and Judah Magnes.
- Contemporary accounts of Kasturba Gandhi's final illness at the Aga Khan Palace, February 1944.
- Judgment of the Special Court, Red Fort, in the Gandhi murder trial, February 1949, and the Punjab High Court appeal, 1949.

- Nathuram Godse's statement to the court, 8 November 1948, full text.
- Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Conspiracy to Murder Mahatma Gandhi, the Kapur Commission, 1969.

COMING NEXT

Part 12: The Final Ledger. Every blunder examined with the question of who actually held the power to decide it, including Kashmir, the United Nations, Article 370, the 55 crore, Tibet and 1962. What would probably have happened without Gandhi, without Jinnah and without the war. The fake quotation guide, listing the most common invented or edited quotes attributed to Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar, Savarkar, Bose and Jinnah, and a two minute method for checking any quotation yourself. One master table with a verdict on every claim tested across all twelve parts. The full source list. And the merged complete book.

Part 11 of a twelve part series. Researched, written and compiled by Lovepreet Singh.

A FACT TESTED HISTORY OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION

How India Became Free and Why It Was Cut in Two

*Every major claim about Independence, Partition and its leaders,
tested against the documentary record and explained in plain English*

PART TWELVE OF TWELVE

The Final Ledger

*Who actually decided each blunder, what would have happened without them,
the fake quotation guide, and a verdict on every claim in this book*

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Lovepreet Singh

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the last part, and I want to say what changed for me while writing it.

I began this project irritated. I had spent years hearing confident claims about our history from people who had clearly never looked anything up, and I wanted to check them. I expected to find that most of them were false.

That is not what I found. What I found is that most of the big claims contain something true, usually one real fact, and are then built into a shape that fact does not support. The British really did write the Roman motto into an official paper. Gandhi really did praise the Moplah rebels while they were killing Hindus. Nehru really did refuse the coalition in 1937 and really did give that press conference in 1946. The Hindu Mahasabha really was in coalition with the Muslim League while the Congress sat in jail. The RSS really did stay out of the freedom struggle by leadership instruction. Ambedkar really did say the Poona Pact was signed under duress.

Almost every side in our argument is telling the truth about the other side and lying about itself. That is the finding of this book, and it took twelve parts to earn it.

This part contains the four things I most wanted to leave a reader with. A table showing **who actually held the power** to make each famous blunder, because most of them are blamed on the wrong person. An honest attempt at the counterfactuals. A guide to the fake quotations, which is the most practically useful thing in the whole book. And one master table with a verdict on every claim tested across all twelve parts.

Thank you for reading it. If it made you check something for yourself, it did what it was for.

Lovepreet Singh

Researcher and author of this series

WHAT IS INSIDE PART TWELVE

CHAPTER 1	The blunder ledger: who actually decided
CHAPTER 2	What if there had been no Gandhi, no Jinnah, no war
CHAPTER 3	The fake quotation guide
CHAPTER 4	The master verdict table
CHAPTER 5	Last word
CLOSING	The full source list for all twelve parts

CHAPTER ONE

The Blunder Ledger: Who Actually Decided

Rule 4 from Part 1: before you blame anyone for a decision, find out who had the authority to make it. Applied systematically, this rule reassigns about half the famous blunders in Indian history.

THE DECISION	WHO ACTUALLY MADE IT	VERDICT
Supporting Khilafat, 1920	Gandhi , over the objection of Jinnah and others. His, entirely.	A serious error, but not the one usually named. The failure was taking no constitutional settlement in return. Part 3.
Suspending the movement after Chauri Chaura, 1922	Gandhi , unilaterally, against Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Lajpat Rai and Bose.	His decision, and the anger was real. But the claim that freedom was within reach fails on every measure. Part 3.
The fast against the Communal Award, 1932	Gandhi . His alone.	He was right about the mechanism and wrong about the method. Ambedkar was right about the representation. Part 4.
Refusing the United Provinces coalition, 1937	Nehru , as Congress president. Azad wanted the coalition and blamed Nehru in print. Not Gandhi.	A serious unforced error at the worst moment, and commonly misattributed. Part 4.
Rejecting the Cripps offer, 1942	The Congress Working Committee collectively, with Gandhi and Nehru agreeing.	Defensible on the terms available. The error came next. Part 6.
Launching Quit India, 1942	Gandhi , ratified by the AICC.	Badly conceived: confrontation in wartime with no plan for the arrest of the entire leadership. It gave the Muslim League three unopposed years. Part 6.
The press conference of 10 July 1946	Nehru , alone.	Real and serious, but not a sufficient cause. The grouping ambiguity was British drafting. Part 8.
Giving Finance to Liaquat Ali Khan, 1946	The Congress , in the interim government negotiations.	Underrated as a blunder. It paralysed the government and convinced Patel that a shared centre was impossible. Part 8.

THE DECISION	WHO ACTUALLY MADE IT	VERDICT
Accepting Partition	Patel first , in the winter of 1946 to 1947. Then the Congress Working Committee , which demanded the partition of Punjab on 8 March 1947. Then Nehru. Gandhi last , and only by asking the AICC to accept a resolution he had opposed for seven years.	The most misattributed decision in Indian history. It was not Gandhi's. Part 8.
Advancing the date to 15 August 1947	Mountbatten , accepted by the Congress and the League, both of whom wanted power quickly.	The single decision that made an orderly transfer impossible. Nobody in the room insisted on more time. Part 8.
Publishing the Radcliffe Award two days late	Mountbatten.	Indefensible, and it cost lives on 14 and 15 August. Part 8.
Delaying the accession of Kashmir	Maharaja Hari Singh , who wanted independence and signed only after the invasion had begun.	Frequently blamed on Nehru. The delay was the ruler's.
Taking Kashmir to the United Nations, January 1948	Nehru , on Mountbatten's advice.	His, and a genuine blunder. It internationalised a dispute India was winning on the ground and produced a framework India has been arguing against ever since.
Accepting the Kashmir ceasefire, January 1949	Nehru and Patel jointly. The government's acceptance carried both.	Usually attributed to Nehru alone. The record does not support that.
Article 370	Drafted chiefly by N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar , a minister without portfolio handling Kashmir and a former prime minister of the state, with Sheikh Abdullah . Patel had reservations and nonetheless piloted it through the Constituent Assembly, at times in Nehru's absence abroad.	Not drafted by Nehru. The article was headed as a temporary provision in its own text. Its long survival is a separate political story.
Paying Pakistan Rs 55 crore, January 1948	The Government of India , honouring a partition financial settlement agreed in December 1947 to which Nehru and Patel were parties, and which Mountbatten held it dishonourable to break. Gandhi supported it.	Not Gandhi's decision, and not a gift. Part 8.
The Hyderabad police action, 1948	Patel.	Militarily and politically successful. The reprisal killings that followed, and the suppression of the Sundarlal Report until 2013, belong on his and the government's ledger. Part 10.

THE DECISION	WHO ACTUALLY MADE IT	VERDICT
Junagadh and the integration of the princely states	Patel, with V. P. Menon.	The single greatest administrative achievement of the period. Part 9.
Tibet, 1950 to 1954	Nehru. Patel's letter of 7 November 1950 warned him explicitly about the consequences of Chinese control of Tibet for India's northern frontier. Patel died the following month.	His, and a serious strategic failure. India surrendered its inherited position in Tibet in the 1954 agreement without securing a boundary settlement.
The military unpreparedness of 1962	Nehru and Krishna Menon.	His, unambiguously. The worst failure of his career and he never recovered from it.

WHAT THE LEDGER SHOWS

MOST BLUNDERS ARE BLAMED ON THE WRONG PERSON

Gandhi's real errors are Khilafat without a settlement, the 1932 fast's method, and the conception of Quit India. He is routinely blamed instead for Partition, for the 55 crore and for Bhagat Singh, and on all three the record clears him.

Nehru's real errors are the 1937 coalition refusal, the 1946 press conference, the United Nations referral, Tibet and 1962. He is often given credit and blame that belong to Patel, Ayyangar or Mountbatten.

Patel accepted Partition first and integrated the princely states. Both belong on his ledger, and his admirers usually mention only one.

And Mountbatten, who advanced the date by ten months and held back the boundary award for two days, escapes almost all Indian criticism, which is remarkable given that those two decisions probably cost more lives than anything else in the list.

CHAPTER TWO

What If There Had Been No Gandhi, No Jinnah, No War

Counterfactuals are guesses, and I mark them as guesses. But refusing to make them is its own dishonesty, because every claim of the form "he caused it" is a counterfactual in disguise.

Without Gandhi

The Congress of 1915 was a body of a few thousand English speaking professionals with no method of reaching anybody else. Somebody might have found a mass method eventually. Nobody had in thirty years.

My best guess is that Indian nationalism would have run along two tracks: constitutional bargaining by the elite, and revolutionary violence by the young. Both existed and both had ceilings. The constitutionalists could not generate pressure. The revolutionaries could not survive contact with the state, as Part 5 showed.

Independence would probably still have come after 1945, because the causes in Part 7 were mostly external to India. But the shape would have been different in one decisive way: **there would have been no organised alternative government ready to receive power.** Compare Indonesia, Indochina, Algeria and Kenya. That is what happens when an empire withdraws and no institution exists to take over.

The untouchability question would also probably have entered national politics later, and only through Ambedkar, who would have had no Congress even to fight with.

Without Jinnah

This is the strongest counterfactual in the whole subject, and it is where I am least confident.

The case that Partition needed him: no other Muslim leader could have unified Punjabi landlords, Bengali peasant leaders, United Provinces gentry and Sindhi notables into one movement. The Unionists, the Krishak Praja Party and the Frontier Congress were all doing well without him in 1937. He was, by common consent of his opponents, the most formidable negotiator of the period. Remove him and the Muslim League plausibly stays what it was in 1937, and Muslim politics stays provincial.

The case that it did not: everything in Parts 1, 2 and 4. The census made religion countable, 1909 made it the unit of voting, the arithmetic of a permanent 25 percent minority was real, and the grievances of 1937 to 1939 were felt by people who had never met Jinnah. Somebody would have voiced it.

My guess, offered as a guess: without Jinnah, India in 1947 is probably a loose federation resembling the Cabinet Mission Plan, with a weak centre and Muslim majority provinces running their own affairs. Whether that federation survives to 1970 is genuinely unknowable. It might have partitioned later and more slowly. It might have held. Part 10 records that the eastern wing

broke away from Pakistan in twenty four years anyway, which should make anyone cautious about assuming that any arrangement in the subcontinent was stable.

Without the war

Britain in 1939 was solvent, its army was loyal, its administration was staffed, and it had just written a constitution in 1935 designed to keep ultimate power in British hands for another generation.

Without the war I think the British stay well into the 1950s. The Congress and the League negotiate from weaker positions, the League never gets the three years of unopposed growth that Part 6 identified, and the settlement, whenever it comes, is closer to a federation than to a partition.

The uncomfortable implication is one that Indian nationalists of every persuasion dislike: **the same event that made freedom possible in 1947 also made Partition likely.** The war weakened Britain and it also created the exact conditions, Congress in prison and the League in office, in which the demand for Pakistan became irresistible.

WAS PARTITION INEVITABLE?

NOT IN 1930. PROBABLE BY 1940. NEAR CERTAIN BY MID 1946.

In 1930 nobody was demanding a separate country, Jinnah was in London practising law, and the Muslim League was a fringe body. Anyone who says it was written in stone from 1906 or 1857 has to explain those facts.

By 1940 the demand existed, the structural machinery of separate electorates was thirty years old, and the Congress had governed in a way that gave the demand a story. Still reversible, and the Cabinet Mission nearly reversed it.

By August 1946, after Calcutta, it was near certain, because the argument had moved from constitutions to survival. Once ordinary people believe that separation is the only thing that will stop the killing, no plan on paper can compete with that.

The lesson, if there is one: political structures create incentives, incentives create organisations, organisations create grievances, and grievances create violence. By the time you reach violence it is too late to argue about the structure. The moment to fix this was 1909, or 1916, or 1937. Nobody did, and each generation blamed the next one.

CHAPTER THREE

The Fake Quotation Guide

The most practically useful chapter in this book. If you read nothing else, read this.

The five families of fake quotation

1. **The complete fabrication.** Words nobody ever said, attached to a famous face on a graphic. These are the easiest to catch because no source exists at all.
2. **The misattribution.** Real words, said by somebody else. Common, because the real speaker is usually obscure and the famous name travels further.
3. **The amputation.** Real words, real speaker, with the surrounding sentences removed so the meaning inverts. The most common and the most effective, because every part of it survives a search.
4. **The translation shift.** A word in Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati or Marathi rendered into an English word with a different weight. Part 2 showed this with *qaum* becoming nation.
5. **The synthetic.** New in the last few years. Generated audio and video of leaders saying things they never said. Already circulating for Nehru.

Documented examples, with what they actually are

THE QUOTATION	WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS
Nehru: "I am English by education, Muslim by culture and Hindu only by accident."	Misattribution. Traced to N. B. Khare, a political opponent, writing about Nehru around 1950. It is a hostile characterisation of Nehru that has been converted into a confession by Nehru.
Attlee: that Gandhi's contribution to Indian independence was "minimal".	Unverified hearsay. A letter written in 1976 recalling a private conversation of 1956, nine years after Attlee's death, printed in a memoir appendix, with no corroboration in Attlee's extensive papers. Part 7 examined it in full.
Ambedkar: that reservations should be abolished the day a tribal woman becomes President.	Fabrication. Not in his collected writings and speeches, which are published in full and searchable. Fact checkers have traced it to social media graphics.
Gandhi: that the Moplahs were right to offer the Koran or the sword, and that conversions to save life were voluntary.	Untraceable. Part 3 searched for it and could not find a volume, page or date in the <i>Collected Works</i> . It circulates almost exclusively on sites arguing one position. I keep it flagged rather than deleted, and if a reader produces a citation I will correct this.
Bose: various statements about the RSS working for the British.	Untraceable. Part 5 searched and found no dated, sourced statement by Bose about the RSS. What is documented is his broadcast of 25 June 1944 praising Savarkar's recruitment drive, which points the other way.

THE QUOTATION	WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS
Photographs of Nehru at an RSS shakha, and video of Nehru warning about a future divisive leader.	Fabricated and synthetic. The video has been identified as generated by artificial intelligence.
Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan: "two nations cannot sit on the same throne."	Real, but amputated and translation shifted. The quote exists, in the Meerut speech of 16 March 1888. The word is <i>qaum</i> , meaning community, and two paragraphs earlier he calls the two communities people who drink from the same well. Part 2.
Elphinstone: "Divide et impera... should be ours."	Real, and usually misdated. It is from a Minute of 14 May 1859, not 1857, and it was written about army recruitment rather than about society. Part 1.

The two minute check

Here is the method. It works on any quotation, including the ones in this book.

1. **Demand three things: date, place, publication.** If whoever sent it to you cannot supply all three, stop. In my experience roughly half of circulating quotations fail here, immediately.
2. **Search a distinctive phrase inside quotation marks.** Not the whole quote, and not keywords. One unusual six word string. If the only results are political sites and image posts with no primary source between them, that is your answer.
3. **Go to the archive.** Almost everything from this period is free online. The list is below. If a man's complete works are published and searchable and the quote is not in them, it is not his.
4. **Read the paragraph before and the paragraph after.** This is where amputated quotes die. If the surrounding text is not available anywhere, treat the quote as unusable.
5. **Check the register.** Does the vocabulary belong to the period? Modern political phrasing in a supposed 1930s quotation is a strong signal. So is a leader conveniently summarising a present day argument in a single tweetable line.
6. **For images and video, reverse image search,** and be aware that convincing synthetic audio and video of these figures now exists.

WHERE TO LOOK, ALL FREE

Gandhi: the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ninety eight volumes, on the Internet Archive and at gandhiserve.net.

Nehru: the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, and the online Nehru archive.

Ambedkar: *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, the Government of Maharashtra volumes, and the Columbia University collection.

Savarkar: savarkar.org publishes his works, and the National Archives of India holds the petitions.

Primary documents of the period: the *Transfer of Power* volumes, the Constituent Assembly debates, provincial assembly proceedings, and the Internet Archive generally.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Master Verdict Table

Every claim tested across the twelve parts, in one place, with the part where the evidence sits.

On the British and the origins

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
Hindus and Muslims lived in perfect harmony until the British came	FALSE	1
There was a thousand year war that made Partition inevitable	FALSE	1
The British deliberately divided Hindus and Muslims	HALF TRUE. They did not create the divide, they institutionalised it.	1
The census created communal politics	MOSTLY TRUE. It created religious arithmetic, which is different.	1
The 1905 partition of Bengal was divide and rule	TRUE, and documented in an official note of 7 February 1904	2
Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan invented the two nation theory	MISLEADING	2
The Simla Deputation was a British command performance	HALF TRUE. A British opportunity, not a British invention.	2
The two nation theory was a Muslim idea	FALSE AS STATED. Lajpat Rai proposed partition in 1923, Savarkar stated two nations in 1937.	2

On Gandhi's politics

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
Gandhi was a racist	TRUE of the young man in South Africa. MISLEADING as a description of his life.	3
Khilafat was Gandhi's original blunder	HALF TRUE. The error was taking no settlement in return.	3
Gandhi excused the Moplah violence	SUBSTANTIALLY TRUE, with two corrections. "He was silent" is false.	3
Gandhi threw away freedom at Chauri Chaura	FALSE in its central claim	3

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
Gandhi and Congress did nothing for the untouchables	HALF TRUE	4
Gandhi could have saved Bhagat Singh	NOT PROVEN. "He did nothing" is FALSE. He appealed at least four times.	5
Gandhi pushed Bose out of the Congress	TRUE	5
Gandhi allowed Partition	TRUE in outcome, FALSE in motive. Patel accepted it first.	8
Gandhi fasted to force money to Pakistan	MISLEADING	8
Gandhi was pro Muslim	HALF TRUE. A method rather than a loyalty.	11

On Gandhi the man

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
The brahmacharya experiments were an abuse of position	TRUE, and the defence does not work	11
There was sexual contact in the experiments	NOT SUPPORTED	11
He killed Kasturba by refusing penicillin	MOSTLY TRUE on facts, MISLEADING in force. A cure was not established.	11
He took quinine for himself immediately afterwards	MISLEADING. He resisted it for about three weeks.	11
He told Hindus to let themselves be killed because they were Hindus	FALSE. He told German Jews and the British the same thing.	11
He was funded by industrialists	TRUE, and he never denied it	11
He enriched himself or his family	FALSE	11
He defended the caste system	TRUE in the 1920s. He changed enormously, late, under Ambedkar's pressure.	11

On the war years and the organisations

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
The Hindu Mahasabha ran coalition governments with the Muslim League	TRUE AND DOCUMENTED, in Bengal, Sindh and the Frontier	6

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
The RSS stayed out of the Quit India movement by instruction	TRUE, from Golwalkar's own words	6
The RSS worked for the British	NOT PROVEN. No evidence found, including in British intelligence files.	6
Savarkar wrote mercy petitions to the British	TRUE. At least six, between 1911 and 1920.	6
Savarkar's recruitment drive was collaboration	TRUE that he did it. "Collaboration" is too simple. Bose praised it on 25 June 1944.	6
The Bengal famine was caused by British policy	British policy was a major cause. It was not the only one. "Genocide" is not supported.	6

On how freedom came

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
Britain was bankrupt and India had become a cost	TRUE	7
The Indian armed forces became unreliable	TRUE, and this was the decisive mechanism	7
Attlee said Gandhi's contribution was minimal	NOT VERIFIED. Should not be used as evidence.	7
We got freedom only because Britain was broke	HALF TRUE. Four equally bankrupt empires chose to fight instead.	7
The INA won India's freedom	HALF TRUE. It failed militarily and succeeded politically after Bose's death.	5 and 7
Gandhi did nothing	FALSE	7

On Partition and after

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
Muslims always wanted Pakistan	FALSE. The League got about 4.4 percent of Muslim votes in 1937.	4
The 1937 United Provinces decision made Pakistan	HALF TRUE, and usually overstated	4
The Congress atrocities charge of 1938	LARGELY FALSE in its details, dangerously true in its theme	4

CLAIM	VERDICT	PART
Nehru's July 1946 press conference destroyed the last chance	HALF TRUE. A real error, not a sufficient cause.	8
The Congress accepted Partition before Gandhi	TRUE, and more than that	8
Pakistan's minorities collapsed and India's grew	TRUE	10
This proves one people is more tolerant than another	FALSE. The difference is structural, not moral.	10
Muslims will outnumber Hindus in India	FALSE. Projections put the Muslim share around 19 percent by 2050.	10
1971 disproved the two nation theory	TRUE, by the people who had voted for it most strongly	10
Godse's statement justified the killing	Two of its five political criticisms are fair. The two factual claims carrying the justification both fail.	11

CHAPTER FIVE

Last Word

Twelve parts, and what I would want a reader to carry away.

Six things I did not expect when I started

1. **India was partitioned three times, not once.** Bengal in 1905, India in 1947, Pakistan in 1971. The first one is forgotten and it is the template for the other two.
2. **In 1937 the Muslim League got about four percent of the Muslim vote.** Everything anybody believes about the inevitability of Pakistan has to survive that number, and almost nothing does.
3. **The two nation theory was stated on both sides.** Lajpat Rai proposed partitioning India in 1923 and Punjab in 1924. Savarkar made two nations Hindu Mahasabha policy in 1937. Jinnah made it League policy in 1940. The dates are not arguable.
4. **Almost nobody wanted Partition and it happened anyway.** Of seventeen major leaders, three wanted it. It was what a room full of people who mostly opposed it agreed to.
5. **Bankrupt empires usually fight.** The Dutch, the French twice and the Portuguese all chose colonial war while broke. What made India different was that there was an organised alternative government ready to receive power, and that is the strongest single argument for what the mass movement achieved.
6. **And the most quoted sentence in the whole debate cannot be sourced.** The Attlee quotation rests on a letter written twenty years after the conversation and nine years after the man's death.

The one lesson

If I had to reduce twelve parts to a sentence, it would be this.

Structures decide, and by the time you can see the consequences the structure is already forty years old.

The census made religion countable in 1871. Separate electorates made it the unit of voting in 1909. The Lucknow Pact made the Congress a party to that system in 1916. Every ambitious politician after that, of every faith, had a rational reason to organise his people by religion, because that was the only currency the system accepted.

Nobody in 1871 or 1909 intended a million deaths in 1947. They were solving administrative problems and minority anxieties, sensibly, in the terms available to them. That is how it works. Nobody decides on a catastrophe. People decide on incentives, and the incentives decide the rest.

Which is why the arguments in this book matter now rather than only historically. The question worth asking about any political proposal is not whether the people making it are good people. It is what the structure will reward once it exists, and who will have a rational reason to do the worst thing it permits.

And a request

I have made mistakes in this book. Twelve parts, hundreds of dates, dozens of casualty ranges and quotations: some of it will be wrong. I have flagged the places where I could not verify something, and there will be others I did not catch.

So do to this book what it does to everybody else. Check the dates. Read the paragraph before and after. Find the archive. If I have got something wrong, the material to prove it is free and online, which is the whole argument of this project.

THE EIGHT RULES, ONE LAST TIME

1. Go to the original source. 2. Read the full paragraph, not the sentence. 3. The date and the audience change everything. 4. Ask who actually had the power to decide. 5. Compare the public words with the private ones. 6. Be very careful with "he could have" claims. 7. Accept that answers can be mixed. 8. Look for what the claim leaves out.

CLOSING

The Full Source List

Everything used across twelve parts, grouped. Almost all of it is free.

Collected works and papers

- *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ninety eight volumes.
- *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, and the Nehru online archive.
- *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Government of Maharashtra, including *Pakistan or the Partition of India* and *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*.
- *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, edited by Durga Das.
- *Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose*, and Bose, *The Indian Struggle*.
- V. D. Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva*, *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, and the Hindu Mahasabha presidential addresses of 1937 and 1942.
- M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1939.
- Bhagat Singh, *Why I Am an Atheist* and *To Young Political Workers*.

Memoirs and contemporary accounts

- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 1958, and *The Complete Version*, 1988.
- Lord Wavell, *The Viceroy's Journal*, edited by Penderel Moon.
- Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, 1953.
- Gandhi, *An Autobiography, or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.
- Leo Amery's diaries as Secretary of State for India.
- The diaries of Manu Gandhi, National Archives of India.

Official documents and inquiries

- Queen Victoria's Proclamation, 1 November 1858. Elphinstone's Minute, 14 May 1859.
- Census reports of British India from 1871 onwards, and the censuses of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh since 1951.
- Indian Councils Act 1909. Government of India Act 1935. Indian Independence Act 1947.
- The Lucknow Pact 1916. The Communal Award 1932 and the Poona Pact. The Lahore Resolution 1940. The Cripps offer 1942. The Cabinet Mission statement of 16 May 1946. The Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947. The Radcliffe Award of 17 August 1947.
- The Pirpur Report 1938 and the Sharif Report 1939.
- V. D. Savarkar's petitions of 1911 to 1920, National Archives of India.
- Judgment in the Gandhi murder trial 1949, and the Kapur Commission report 1969.
- Reports of the Shah Nawaz Committee 1956, the Khosla Commission 1970 and the Mukherjee Commission 2005 on Subhas Chandra Bose.

- The Munir Report on the Punjab disturbances of 1953. The Objectives Resolution 1949 and the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan debates.
- The Constitution of India 1950, and the Constituent Assembly debates.
- The Sundarlal Report on Hyderabad, released 2013. The Srikrishna Commission report. The Sachar Committee report 2006.
- The *Transfer of Power* document series and British Cabinet papers, 1942 to 1947.

Scholarship

- C. A. Bayly on religious conflict from 1700 to 1860. Bernard Cohn on the census and social categories.
- Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition*.
- Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, on Jinnah and the bargaining counter argument.
- Marcelo de Paiva Abreu on Indian sterling balances, 1940 to 1953.
- Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, and the Famine Inquiry Commission report on Bengal 1945.
- Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, *The South African Gandhi*, and the responses to it.
- Conrad Wood and others on the Mappila rebellion. Uma Kaura on Congress and League relations 1937 to 1939.
- Pew Research Center on religious demography in India.
- Frances W. Pritchett's document collections at Columbia University, which host the Meerut speech of 1888, Rahmat Ali's 1933 pamphlet and Ambedkar's *Pakistan or the Partition of India* in full text.

THE END OF THE SERIES

This is the twelfth and final part. A merged edition containing all twelve parts in a single volume accompanies it.

The book began with a promise: that no answer would be chosen because it made any side happy, and that where the honest answer was that we do not know, it would say so. I have kept that promise as well as I could. Where I failed, the sources are listed above and they are free, and you are better equipped to catch me now than you were at the start of Part 1.

That was the point.