

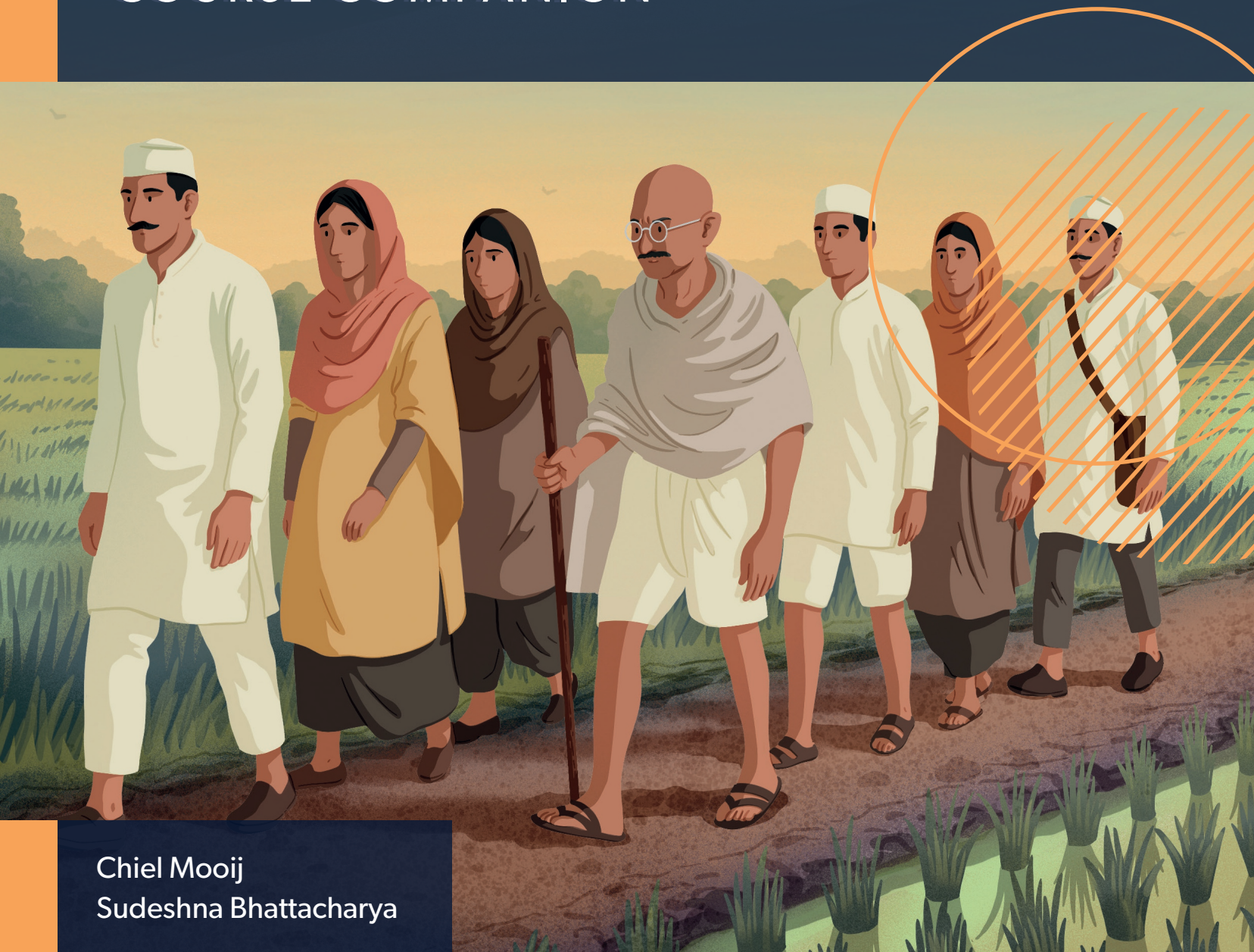
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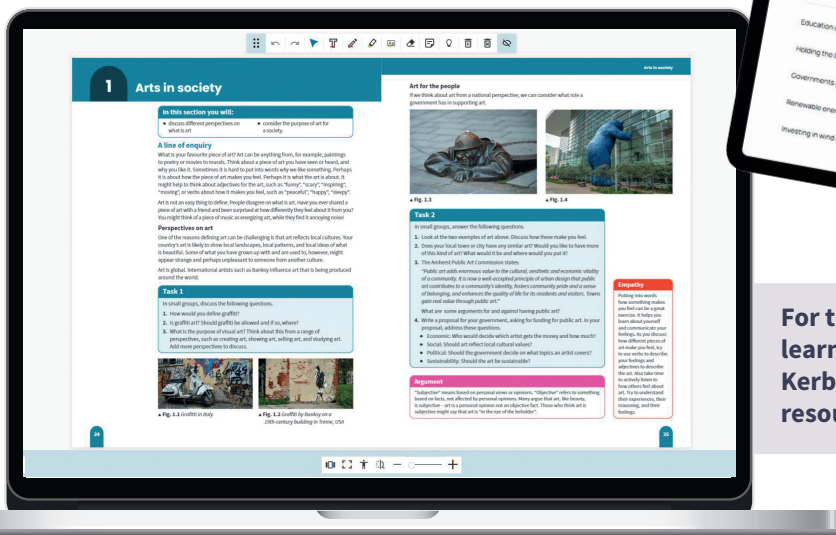
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Concept connections

Significance

During a visit to China in the 1970s, the US National Security Advisor asked the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai what he thought of the consequences of the French Revolution, which happened almost 200 years prior. “Too early to say,” he replied.

1. In small groups, discuss your ideas on when we should start analysing the impact of past events as historians.
2. Now think about movements around the world that were inspired by the French Revolution, such as the Haitian Revolution that led to that country’s independence from France in 1804. Does it make a difference to your ideas on whether a past event had a significant impact on later events or not?
3. The interpreter later revealed Zhou Enlai was referring to the 1968 Paris riots. Does this make a difference to your ideas?

Key terms

Democratic: Relating to a system of government in which power is held by the people, who exercise it directly or through elected representatives.

Autocratic: A form of governance where absolute power is concentrated in the hands of a single ruler or a small group, who often rule without constitutional constraints, political opposition or democratic accountability.

Collective claims: Common needs expressed by a larger group of people.

This does not mean that more **democratic** forms of government are necessarily more accommodating to popular movements. Popular movements may evolve to champion the rights of minorities who can quite easily be excluded from influencing decision-making in both democratic and **autocratic** societies. In 2023, Australia held a referendum that asked whether people agreed with amending the constitution to recognize Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original inhabitants of the country and with setting up a representative body. More than 60% voted “No”.

The existence of various forms of political participation can even be used to attempt to silence popular movements, with ruling elites arguing that protesters can vote or run for office to make change happen. Political parties can act as gatekeepers for people making these attempts, potentially limiting their influence. According to UN Women, as of 2024 “[o]nly six countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda (61 per cent), Cuba (56 per cent), Nicaragua (54 per cent), Andorra (50 per cent), Mexico (50 per cent), New Zealand (50 per cent) and the United Arab Emirates (50 per cent)” (UN Women, March 2025).

Table 1.1 presents six political opportunities for—or threats to—popular movements as identified by Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow.

- | |
|---|
| 1. The degree to which power is centralized in a government |
| 2. The stability of the relations of political actors in government |
| 3. A government’s openness to new actors and movements |
| 4. The receptiveness of a government towards collective claims |
| 5. The availability of influential allies or supporters |
| 6. Changes in any of the above factors |

▲ **Table 1.1** Political opportunities or threats for popular movements, by D. McAdam and S. Tarrow, 2019

A lack of power centralization and regime cohesion have sometimes created clear opportunities for popular movements. If there are competing sources of power or the sources lack cohesion, popular movements can try to absorb these. In many societies, bureaucrats and soldiers are drawn from ordinary citizens who see the impact of government policies on their fellow citizens. They can be pressured by relatives into abandoning their posts or won over by popular movements. This was seen during the Syrian Civil War, for example. After the fall of Aleppo, Syria's second biggest city, to rebel forces on 29 November 2024, conscripted and poorly paid soldiers quickly abandoned their positions. Within ten days, the government collapsed.

Whether a government is open to new actors and movements and receptive to collective claims greatly influences the chances of success and the methods used to create change. Fidel Castro originally tried to influence politics through the established **political structures** of 1950s Cuba, which would not accommodate him. He claims he only launched a violent revolt because there were no other options left for his movement.

Both governments and popular movements often rely heavily on the availability of influential allies. The white minority government in South Africa gained support from the United States and the United Kingdom, whereas the African National Congress (ANC) gained sympathy from newly independent countries in Africa, such as Tanzania and Zambia, and those siding with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, such as Cuba. Supporters can also be won internally. Archbishop Desmond Tutu used his influential position in the Anglican Church and later his Nobel Peace Prize to advocate for the end of **apartheid**.

McAdam and Tarrow's final point, "any change in the above factors", may actually be one of the most important ones. If government cohesion changes due to the death of its leader, this may present an opportunity for a popular movement. The leader of the Soviet Union, Josef Stalin, died in 1953 and was replaced by Nikita Khrushchev. When people started protesting in Hungary in 1956 against the Soviet Union's grip on the country, they did not yet know how the new leader would respond to such a challenge. On the 13th day of the uprising 17 heavily armed Soviet tank divisions rolled into the country, putting an end to the protest and any hope for different leadership from Moscow.

One of the key elements for any popular movement is first becoming aware of the political situation in the country, and the perceived or real oppression that is taking place. This political consciousness can be hard to develop when forms of oppression or inequality may be deeply ingrained in the country's political structures and culture. External allies may try to help a popular movement emerge in another country—or indeed to prevent it. For example, women's rights movements in Chile have been working towards political consciousness since the end of the 20th century because the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet from 1973 to 1990 and government violence have silenced powerful female voices and have ingrained ideas among women of not openly engaging with politics.

Key terms

Political structure: The organized ways in which a government or state is set up and functions. This includes institutions like parliaments, courts and political parties, as well as the laws and processes that guide how decisions are made.

Apartheid: A system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination that existed in South Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s, designed to maintain white supremacy and oppress non-white populations.

ATL Approaches to learning

Self-management skills

When organizing your thoughts around the various political factors that led to the emergence of popular movements, consider creating a table like Table 1.2.

This will help you to identify differences and similarities between the examples discussed in this section and any self-selected case studies.

Factor	British suffragette movement	Egyptian Revolution	Self-selected case study
Political system	Parliamentary monarchy	Single-party state/dictatorship	
Centralization and cohesion of power	Centralized rule, competition between political parties	Military control over politics and economy	
Regime openness to actors and claims	Resistance against women’s involvement in politics and non-state actors	Minimal opportunity for political dissent , police brutality	
Availability of allies	Women’s rights activists in the United States and across Europe; rifts in women’s rights movement over the inclusion of female workers	Pro-democratic and pro-Islamist groups across the Arab world challenging military dictatorship	
Political consciousness	Growing consciousness	Clear awareness of political repression	
Changes in the above	Expansion of voting rights, female role models, First World War	Start of the Arab Spring and successful removal of Tunisian president	

▲ Table 1.2 Exemplar table for organizing detail on political factors that led to the emergence of popular movements

Key terms

Dissent: Expressing disagreement with a commonly accepted idea, decision or authority; in social movements it often refers to people speaking out against government policies, social norms or laws they believe are unfair.

Herrenvolk democracy: “Master race” democracy; a term coined by historian George Frederickson to describe a system of democracy where only a specific ethnic group has electoral rights.

1.1.1 Political factors and the British suffragette movement

The end of the 19th century in Britain is called the late-Victorian era, named after its queen who ruled from 1837 to 1901. By this time, the country had a long history of parliamentary rule and continual attempts to restrain the rights of the monarchy, dating back to the Magna Carta charter of rights of 1215. Great Britain had also established itself as the world’s largest empire, with colonies in all continents. Historian George Frederickson calls the combination of democratic rule for some and racist attitudes towards others **Herrenvolk democracy**, which could also be applied to the development of British democracy at home and colonial rule and enslavement abroad. In 1832, Britain extended the right to vote to middle-class men in the First Reform Act, but it took until 1884, after the Third Reform Act, for a majority of men to have gained the right to vote. Opening up the vote created opportunities for more progressive ideas to enter the political spectrum, improving working rights and access to healthcare and education. Despite all these developments and a female head of state on the throne for over 60 years, politics was still very much considered a male affair.

The suffragette movement in Britain emerged against the backdrop of political reform, the Age of Enlightenment, the ideals of the French Revolution and female role models in art and academia. These varied from the social commentary of

Jane Austen's novels to the first woman to qualify as a doctor, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. Throughout the 19th century, British women had been campaigning for equal pay and equal access to education, with London University allowing women to graduate from 1878. True equality, some women activists thought, would come from the right to vote. In 1887 the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) unified various local organizations which each campaigned for women's right to vote. As the movement grew, absorbing groups with different backgrounds—such as urban or rural, or upper or lower class—created challenges. It became more difficult to sustain group cohesion, with different attitudes towards the inclusion of working-class women, for example, and the methods of protest such as non-violence to violent destruction of property.

Concept connections

Significance

Great Britain is identified as a major global power that influenced the political factors of popular movements across the globe. What other major global powers can you identify that have left their mark on historical developments, or even events today? How do these powers differ from Britain?

The main political parties of the time, the Tories and the Liberals, were initially united in their opposition to women's right to vote. They were accustomed to politics being a male arena and were unsure about how the female vote might affect election results. Christine Bolt, former Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Kent, also relates this to Britain's empire-building, which she argues was a masculine endeavour. Although the British political establishment had shown a certain openness to various actors and collective claims, by the time the suffragettes were banging on the door of Westminster, home of the British parliament, it remained closed.

The move towards female suffrage in Britain did not happen in isolation. Countries like the United States and Australia, closely watched by their former colonizer, saw women make greater advances towards their goal. The Seneca Falls Convention held in New York in 1848 is argued to be the first women's rights convention and the United States also saw the unification of various suffrage groups under the new banner of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890. In 1894, South Australia granted women in the colony the right to vote and stand for parliament. Newspapers and pamphlets kept Britain's suffragettes up to date on developments, providing an inspirational current towards success.

One of the most visible and, certainly in her time, contentious activists for female suffrage was Emmeline Pankhurst, who visited the United States various times to exchange experiences (see Figure 1.4). Pankhurst had a broader worldview, having been educated in France and having parents who induced her into political activism. This political consciousness made her impatient at the slow reforms and moderate activism of fellow suffragettes, leading her to utilize more radical methods of property destruction and hunger strikes. This led to outrage in the **mainstream media** and parliament, but also encouraged more women to consider their own opinion, and the claims Pankhurst and her fellow activists were making, which further expanded political consciousness. The First World War, upsetting political and social structures across the country, would provide the ultimate push for giving women over 30 the right to vote in 1918.

Reference

Read more about the social factors that led to the emergence of the suffragette movement, such as patriarchal opinions of women's roles, abilities and purpose, in Section 1.4.1: Social factors and the British suffragette movement.



▲ Figure 1.4 British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928), being jeered by a crowd in New York, c. 1911

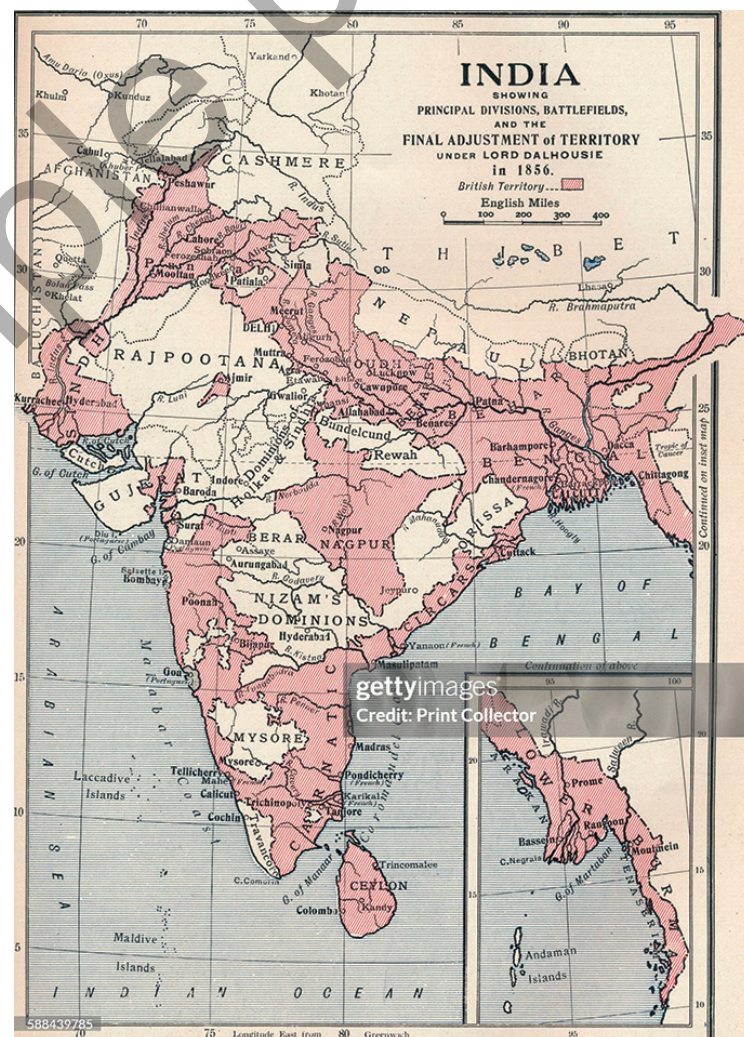
Key term

Mainstream media: The most widely used news sources, like newspapers, television channels and news websites, that reach a large audience and often reflect the views of powerful groups in society.

1.1.2 Political factors and the Indian national movement

The Indian subcontinent, like many other parts of the world, has witnessed numerous historical political developments over an extended span of time. These developments were deeply influenced by specific historical contexts, including territorial conquests by external forces and the rise of empires from within the region. Each phase of conquest and empire-building contributed to the dynamic interplay of continuity and change that shaped the subcontinent's history. Among the most significant were the invasions that led to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire. These empires were characterized by their complex administrative systems, cultural diversity and architectural developments, which left enduring legacies on the subcontinent.

British colonial rule marked a fundamental change in the subcontinent's political, economic and social history. The British had no intention to settle in India and integrate with its people. They ruled as overlords, extracting resources from the colony to serve the mother country, Britain, while a narrow political elite from London controlled India's fortunes. By 1856, when Lord Dalhousie's tenure as Governor-General ended, the British had established themselves as the colonial ruler over most of what is now Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Figure 1.5 shows the areas under British control at that time.



► Figure 1.5 Map of India in 1856 from *Cassell's History of England, Vol. VI*

In 1857–1858, the Indian people mounted the greatest challenge against British rule on a scale never seen before, protesting against colonial economic exploitation and political oppression. Bipan Chandra, formerly Emeritus Professor of Modern History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, suggests this was the starting point of the Indian national movement. Some historians include earlier wars and uprisings against British and other European colonial advances as part of a wider movement for Indian independence, in addition to the many other historiographical debates about the Rebellion. British historians writing about the “Indian Rebellion” in the early 20th century often sought to downplay its significance, whereas today some historians recognize its significance by calling it the First War of Indian Independence. In 2007, the government of India celebrated the 150th anniversary of this important moment in history.

Concept connections

Perspectives

When analysing historical developments, Lesley J. Wood of York University, Toronto, warns against reframing historical examples as part of a popular movement. In contrast, Ruud Koopmans of Humboldt University, Berlin, argues that popular movements develop in cycles, or protest waves, building on successes and failures of previous experiences and reinventing or rebranding the movement in response to the political climate of that specific time. From this perspective, previous developments can very well be considered part of the emergence of a broader popular movement.

In groups, you will either stand for or against the following statement:

“Prior historical development should be considered as part of a popular movement’s emergence.”

First, exchange ideas and research what could be good arguments to use in a debate. Next, consider examples from this book and the nation or region you reside in, and how they could support your view. Invite another teacher to observe the debate and consider which group presents the most compelling arguments.

After reading this book and studying multiple popular movements, revisit the above claim. Have your views changed at all? Why or why not?

ATL Approaches to learning

Thinking skills

Historian Benoy Kumar Sarkar wrote a damning review of Vincent Smith’s 1919 *The Oxford History of India*, arguing that it villainized and oversimplified ancient Hindu and Muslim empires in favour of British rule over the subcontinent. Sarkar argues that “Mr Smith’s point of view is, however, one that naturally pervades the psychology of every European and American student of oriental culture and politics, [tainted] as it is, with the dogma of the ‘superior race.’” In other words, the study of India’s culture and politics is influenced by the idea (held by Smith and others) that Western culture is “superior” to India’s.

To what extent is history written through the lens of the time the historian lives in, and their personal bias? How would analyses of British colonial rule in India by British and Indian historians differ between the early 20th century and the present day?

ATL Approaches to learning

Self-management skills

Revisit Table 1.2 and add your insights from the Indian national movement to the table.

ATL Approaches to learning

Thinking skills

How does the emergence of Indigenous rights movements compare and contrast with independence movements? Identify an example of each, from this book or elsewhere, and compare and contrast the political factors of both cases that led to the emergence of the movements.

In 1858, formal British rule over India was established, also called the British Raj. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, an Indian social scientist and professor who died two years after India gained independence, argues that Indian unity under British rule was as much a myth as European political unity at that time. Britain concluded separate treaties with various princely states, emphasizing the different nature of all these areas of the Indian subcontinent in the wider scheme of divide-and-rule. Decisions about India were largely made in London, while a British viceroy (the representative of the British monarch in India) enacted these decisions in Delhi (now New Delhi). The civil service, military, police and judiciary were all organized in a way to ensure British control. The British responded violently to any challenge to British rule, with estimates of up to 800 000 people dying in the First War of Independence (1857). This stifled any form of regime openness to Indian actors and group claims. It would take until 1885 for the Indian National Congress (INC) to be founded, helped by its moderate suggestions for reform within the British Empire.

The 19th century was an era of reform in British politics, opening up the vote to a majority of British men and recognizing the importance of healthcare, education and social welfare. At the same time, it saw further expansion of the British Empire, most notably in Africa after the 1884 Congress of Berlin. The expansion of the British Empire created greater revenues but also challenges for Britain in maintaining control of its possessions in all continents. The United States had already led the way in its War of Independence, with British troops vacating the country in 1783, but by the end of the 19th century Britain also saw challenges to its rule in South Africa in the Boer Wars. It is not a coincidence that one of India's most notable independence activists, Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi, lived in South Africa from 1893 to 1914. Britain also saw rivalry in Europe intensify with various shifting alliances, and the establishment and growth of the German Empire from 1871.

India's unsuccessful First War of Independence and the subsequent establishment of formal British rule stimulated the political consciousness of many people across the Indian subcontinent. Although a further 90 years of British rule meant that whole generations grew up with a British monarch as their head of state and British domination of any form of political establishment, discussions about the unethical nature of this arrangement were constant and visible to many. In his non-violent struggle for independence, Gandhi tried to convince his fellow citizens to engage in civil disobedience, by not following orders from superiors in the army or ignoring British laws. As resistance to British rule grew, the Second World War also provided Indian independence movements with an opportunity to gain momentum while Britain was weakened by war.

1.1.3 Political factors and the Indigenous rights movement in Canada

The lands that would become known as Canada also saw various attempts at colonization by European powers from the 16th century onwards. It was nearly twice the size of British India, but with less than one fiftieth of its population. Canada was not a single political unit; the northern part of the Americas had been home to First Nations, Métis and Inuit for thousands of years, with the earliest Paleo-Indian groups migrating from Asia across the then land bridge in the Bering Strait to what are now the continents of North America and South America. Various Europeans claimed the "discovery" of these lands, which were

argued to be “terra nullius” or vacant land, but these same “discoverers” then required the support of the local population to navigate the lands. Despite earlier French advances, the British had established control over nearly all Canadian territories in the Treaty of Paris of 1763. Just like in other colonies, Britain established treaties with **Indigenous peoples** allowing for some limited internal **autonomy**, but leaving full external control in British hands. By the early 19th century, Europeans outnumbered the Indigenous population in Canada, who had been severely impacted by European diseases and violence, making them a minority in their homelands.

After quelling the threat of the expansion of the American War of Independence to Canada (followed by another attempt in 1812), Britain created a Lower Canada made up of largely French-speaking Europeans and an English-speaking Upper Canada. Arrangements were made for local assemblies, with the British governor able to veto any bill. In 1867, these Canadas were then unified into a federal “dominion”—granting them the right to self-governance, but not independence. The dominion of Canada expanded westward, defeating various Indigenous groups and negotiating treaties with them.

For a long time, some form of recognition of Indigenous peoples had worked in the interest of the European **settlers**. They could benefit from their knowledge of the terrain, could claim to protect them from rival European powers or the United States of America, and it could turn them into consumers of European goods. Archana Ojha of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, explains how this began to change as attempts of **assimilation** ensued. Indigenous communities were forced into specific areas of land created for them called reserves, with school, religion and culture dominated by European ideas. From the 19th century, residential schools led by Christian clergy became notorious for separating Indigenous children from their parents to destroy any form of Indigenous culture and subjecting them to widespread abuse and violence, from caning to murder.

Indigenous peoples across the Americas faced similar challenges to their compatriots in Canada. They too had been decimated by colonial violence and European diseases, and had quickly found themselves a minority in newly established countries with a dominant culture based on mercantilist trade, European languages, Christianity and white superiority. Even if political activity was allowed by the dominant powers, this had to be done through the European political systems, and as a minority facing racist attitudes and practices, often codified in law. Segregating Indigenous peoples in specific areas or reserves kept them out of political centres and the political spotlight. There were very limited opportunities to exchange ideas, offer support, or mobilize as a larger group or movement.

In Canada, political consciousness was deeply affected by attempts at assimilation by the Canadian state. Whole generations were forcibly disconnected from their cultural heritage and traumatized by not only their mistreatment at the hands of the dominant settlers, but by the misbehaviour within their own community as a result of the psychological damage they endured themselves. The Indian Act of 1876 largely restricted Indigenous political activity, so 19th-century Canada saw occasional violent attempts at challenging European rule, such as the 1885 North-West Rebellion by the Métis (those of mixed Indigenous and European descent).

Key terms

Indigenous peoples: In Canada, the original inhabitants of the land such as First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

Autonomy: The ability or right of an individual, group or entity to make free decisions and govern itself independently without external control.

Settlers: People who move to a new region, often colonizing land already inhabited by Indigenous communities and establishing dominant systems that undermine the rights, cultures and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

Assimilation: A process of societal and/or governmental pressure on groups to adopt the dominant culture in a particular country or region and let go of their own heritage and culture.

Indigenous peoples

In the context of Canadian law, “Indian” refers to a legal term used in the Indian Act of 1876 to classify First Nations populations. It does not include Métis or Inuit communities. The government defined who qualified as an “Indian” and used this classification to control many aspects of Indigenous life, such as land, identity and political rights. Today, the term is considered outdated and offensive by many, and terms like First Nation, Indigenous or status/non-status First Nation are more appropriate and respectful.