Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Colonial rule and the nationalist challenge in India, 1919–47

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The Rowlatt Acts, Amritsar and the Government of India Act, 1919

- More than a million Indian soldiers served Britain in the First World War, and many Indians expected self-government in return. Instead, the Rowlatt Acts (1919) let the British imprison suspected troublemakers without trial, which caused protests and strikes.
- On 13 April 1919 at Amritsar, General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on an unarmed crowd in an enclosed garden, the Jallianwala Bagh. The official figure was 379 killed, and Indian estimates were far higher. The massacre turned many moderate Indians, including Gandhi, against British rule.
- The Government of India Act (1919) set up **dyarchy**: in the provinces, elected Indian ministers ran education, health and farming, but British governors kept finance, the police and justice, and Britain still controlled the central government.

Gandhi and Congress, 1919–39

- Gandhi led the **Indian National Congress** in campaigns of **satyagraha**, non-violent resistance, for **swaraj** (self-rule). Non-cooperation (1920–22) meant boycotting British goods, schools and courts and wearing home-spun cloth. Gandhi called it off after violence at Chauri Chaura (1922) and was imprisoned.
- He also campaigned for the "untouchables", the lowest caste. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the **Muslim League**, increasingly feared that a Hindu-majority Congress would not protect Muslims.
- The Simon Commission (1927) had no Indian members and was boycotted. In 1930 Gandhi's Salt March to the sea at Dandi broke the British salt tax and began a new civil disobedience campaign, with tens of thousands arrested. Round Table Conferences in London (1930–32) achieved little.

- The Government of India Act (1935) gave the provinces self-government. Congress won most provinces in the 1937 elections, while the **Muslim League** did badly, which deepened Muslim fears.

The Second World War, 1939–45

- The Viceroy declared war for India without asking Indian leaders, so the Congress ministries resigned. In the Lahore Resolution (1940) the **Muslim League** called for separate Muslim states, the idea of Pakistan.
- The Cripps Mission (1942) offered dominion status after the war, but was rejected. Congress launched the Quit India campaign in 1942, and its leaders were imprisoned for most of the war, while the **Muslim League** grew stronger.
- Subhas Chandra Bose led the Indian National Army, which fought alongside Japan against the British. A famine in Bengal in 1943 killed about three million people. The Viceroy, Wavell, called the Simla Conference (1945), which failed over who could represent Muslims.

Independence and partition, 1945–47

- The new Labour government in Britain (1945) wanted to give India independence. The Cabinet Mission (1946) proposed a united India with strong provinces, but Congress and the League couldn't agree.
- Jinnah called for Direct Action Day in August 1946, and thousands were killed in Calcutta in fighting between Hindus and Muslims. Violence spread.
- Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, brought independence forward. On 14 and 15 August 1947 India was partitioned into two independent countries, India and Pakistan. About 10 to 15 million people fled across the new borders, and perhaps up to a million were killed.

Key terms

Satyagraha	Gandhi's method of non-violent resistance, meaning "truth force".
Swaraj	Self-rule for India.
Dyarchy	The 1919 system that split government in the provinces between Indian ministers and British governors.
Indian National Congress	The main Indian nationalist party, led by figures such as Gandhi and Nehru.
Muslim League	The party that represented Indian Muslims, led by Jinnah, which came to demand Pakistan.
Partition	The division of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

Your notes

1. What did the Rowlatt Acts allow?
2. Who ordered troops to fire at Amritsar in 1919?
3. What was dyarchy?
4. What was satyagraha?
5. Why was the Simon Commission boycotted?
6. What did the Salt March of 1930 protest against?
7. What did the Lahore Resolution (1940) call for?
8. What was the Quit India campaign?

Answers

1. Imprisonment without trial
2. General Dyer
3. Splitting provincial government between Indian ministers and British governors
4. Non-violent resistance
5. It had no Indian members
6. The British tax on salt
7. Separate states for Muslims
8. A Congress campaign demanding that Britain leave India

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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