CHAPTER 3

Historicizing WW II in Context of India

3.1. Historiography of Indian Nationalism

The historiography of Indian nationalism reflects diverse perspectives shaped by Western scholarly influence, especially during colonial and post-colonial periods. Western scholars often impose Eurocentric frameworks, yet their engagement with indigenous narratives has enriched understanding (Bates, 2006). Indian leaders voiced nationalist sentiments rooted in local experiences, while Western analyses occasionally revealed cultural biases. This interplay highlights the complex dynamics of colonialism and intellectual exchange, shaping the conceptualization of Indian nationalism in academic discourse.

The influence of Western scholarly traditions significantly shapes contemporary perceptions of Indian nationalism. Emphasizing the importance of diverse perspectives underscores the need to analyse historical narratives critically. Indian nationalism is examined through various lenses, including liberal English, Marxist critique, and the voices of groups like the subalterns. Scholars engage in a continuous dialogue through rigorous examination of historical events, original documents, and ideological underpinnings, enriching our understanding of this complex historical phenomenon (Embree, 2024).

3.1.1. Liberal Englishmen's Perspective.

Early interpretations of Indian nationalism, often championed by liberal English scholars, linked its origins to the rise of an English-educated middle class dissatisfied with British rule. This perspective highlights how the aspirations of this middle class clashed with colonial governance structures, sparking nationalist sentiments. Scholars such as Thomson and Garrett emphasized the pivotal role of British rule in fuelling nationalist unrest, framing it as a struggle rooted in class interests within the colonial system (Chomsky, 2015).

3.1.2. Nationalist Viewpoint.

In contrast, nationalist historians advocated for an interpretation emphasizing the quest for self-identity as the driving force behind Indian nationalism(Bates, 2006). They posited that, while class interests played a role, the essence of the movement lay in asserting an indigenous identity against colonial hegemony. Nationalists like Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chunder Dutt highlighted the economic exploitation and cultural subjugation under British rule, framing the nationalist struggle as a quest for self-determination and cultural affirmation (Aguiar, 2011). However, scholars like Ramesh Chandra Majumdar offered nuanced perspectives, acknowledging the complexities of Indian society and the diversity of nationalist motivations(Majumdar, 2018).

3.1.3. Cambridge School Perspective.

The emergence of the Cambridge School in the mid-20th century brought a significant shift to the study of Indian nationalism. Influenced by scholars like John Gallagher, this approach highlighted the role of local elites and communal dynamics in shaping nationalist movements(Upadhya, 2002). Scholars such as Anil Seal emphasized caste and community interests, challenging the idea of a unified nationalist narrative (Seal, 1968). While critiquing earlier idealistic interpretations, the Cambridge School focused on pragmatic leadership. However, it drew criticism for overlooking ideological motivations and popular participation in the nationalist struggle. Critics, like Tapan Roy Chowdhury, argued for a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges grassroots mobilization and diverse expressions of Indian nationalism (Sengupta, 1993).

3.1.4. Marxist Viewpoint.

Marxist historians offered an alternative perspective, analyzing Indian nationalism within the framework of class struggle and economic development. Initially characterized by a deterministic view of history, Marxist interpretations evolved to acknowledge the complexities of nationalist dynamics. Scholars like Bipan Chandra and Sumit Sarkar emphasized the intersectionality of class, caste, and religious identities in shaping nationalist consciousness (Dhar, 2023). They argued that while class interests were central, the nationalist movement transcended narrow class divisions to mobilize mass support against colonial oppression.

3.1.5. Subaltern Viewpoint.

The rise of subaltern studies challenged the prevailing narratives of Indian nationalism by foregrounding marginalized voices and communities. Led by scholars like Ranjit Guha, this approach criticized the dominance of elite perspectives in traditional historiography. Subaltern historians emphasized the grassroots activism of peasants, workers, and marginalized groups, presenting Indian nationalism as complex and diverse(M. Mukherjee, 1988). However, the subaltern perspective faced criticism for its materialistic focus and oversimplified views on class identity. Scholars like Sumit Sarkar urge a nuanced understanding of intersecting identities and power dynamics(Kadam Assist, n.d.). The involvement of colonial intellectuals further complicated notions of a unified subaltern class, highlighting the diversity of experiences and interests within marginalized communities.

3.1.6. Post-Colonial Viewpoint.

Recent scholarship has enhanced the study of Indian nationalism by examining its post-colonial impacts and global significance. Scholars like Partha Chatterjee and Gyan Prakash delve into post-colonial nation-building complexities, highlighting tensions between Western modernity and indigenous traditions(Murray, n.d.). They argue that Indian nationalism, while unique, engages in broader debates on identity and governance. Scholars aim to dismantle Eurocentric narratives by employing post-colonial theory and emphasizing non-Western agencies in shaping destinies.

The historiography of Indian nationalism presents a diverse array of ideologies and debates. From liberal and Marxist interpretations to nationalist and subaltern perspectives, each framework offers valuable insights. As scholars continue exploring various methodologies, the discourse evolves, enriching our understanding of the past and informing contemporary discussions on identity, politics, and nation-building in India.

3.2. Political Awakening in India

WW II is a crucial event in modern history, profoundly impacting nations globally. With escalating tensions and alliances among European powers preceding it, the conflict extended worldwide, causing immense devastation. India, then under British colonial rule,

played a significant role in the war, contributing 2.5 million soldiers across various fronts. Despite their valour and sacrifices, they often faced neglect and unfulfilled promises from the colonial administration. This disparity intensified dissatisfaction with British rule. The war also strained India's economy, diverting resources from development and worsening existing grievances(Turner, 2005). This economic strain underscored the urgency for India to attain independence, fuelling the nation's struggle for freedom.

These testing times catalysed a political awakening in India, with demands for increased governance participation and post-war reforms fostering nationalist sentiment. The war's global impact reshaped the geopolitical landscape, offering opportunities for nationalist movements amid the collapse of empires and weakening colonial powers. India's strategic and economic significance to the British Empire heightened during this period, with expectations of manpower and resources for the war effort. However, failure to address Indian aspirations for self-governance exacerbated resentment and strengthened the resolve of Indian nationalists.

3.3. India's Response to WW I

In the global context of WW I, India's political response was marked by a complex interplay of factors. The war, fought from 1914 to 1918, had significant implications for India as a British colony. The Indian political leadership, primarily represented by the INC, responded with a mix of cooperation and opposition(G. Singh, n.d.).

The Moderates, driven by a sense of duty towards the empire, viewed supporting Britain's war efforts as a means to gain goodwill and potentially secure greater autonomy and reforms within the empire(Kennedy & Tuck, 2016). In contrast, extremists like Tilak strategically supported the war, aiming to leverage India's loyalty for political concessions and self-government("Congr. Indian Natl.," 2017). The most radical response came from revolutionaries who saw the war as an opportunity to escalate resistance against British rule, viewing it as ripe for upheaval and revolution(Levy & Adams, 2018). Diverse strategies and beliefs regarding India's role in the conflict reflect their interpretations of the country's future within the empire. Despite Indian soldiers reinforcing loyalty to the British Empire, the aftermath of the war exposed the hollowness of British promises, and the return of Punjabi soldiers intensified anti-colonial sentiments, particularly in Punjab, fuelled by nationalist agitation(Rathee, 2022). Discontent grew as the Montagu-

Chelmsford Reforms failed to deliver on expectations of home rule, leading to mass civil disobedience. Mounting casualties and coercive recruitment further fuelled nationalism, challenging British rule's legitimacy(Woods, 1994).

The social and economic impacts of WW I in India were substantial. Recruited communities saw higher literacy rates, gaining respect. Economically, India benefited from increased demand for its goods in Britain but faced challenges like disrupted shipping and inflation(Cain & Hopkins, 1980). The war also strained the Indian economy, with significant cash, goods, and loans sent to the British government, worsening existing socio-economic inequalities. Despite these challenges, the war economy inadvertently bolstered Indian capitalism, as domestic manufacturing sectors like cotton and steel benefited from the decline in British goods. Furthermore, British investment rerouted to the UK created opportunities for Indian capital. However, the war also laid bare the exploitative nature of British colonialism, galvanizing movements for independence and social justice.

As WW I progressed, discontent in India grew due to the absence of political reforms and increased repression. Criticism of British policies intensified, leading to more vocal advocacy for confrontation(Darwin, 1986). This unrest culminated tragically in events like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre(Sohal, n.d.). India's response to the global conflict shifted from initial cooperation to a more assertive and critical stance, marking the beginning of heightened political awareness and paving the path towards self-governance and independence.

3.4. Leadership Vacuum and Rise of Radical Nationalists in the Interwar Period

During the period between WW I and II, India faced a leadership vacuum with the departure of prominent leaders like Tilak and Gokhale. This void led to the rise of radical ideologies, notably within the INC and the broader nationalist movement. Radical nationalists emerged alongside mainstream leaders, significantly reshaping the anti-colonial movement. Despite often being overshadowed by the Gandhian narrative, these nationalists profoundly impacted India's path to independence, challenging the status quo and injecting urgency into the nationalist struggle(Vinthagen, 2022).

A defining feature of these radical nationalists was their penchant for clandestine operations, rendering their activities obscure within the colonial archival record. The reluctance of colonial authorities to accord prominence to their contributions stemmed from apprehensions that undue attention to these revolutionaries might mobilize the masses, posing a genuine threat to imperial authority. Instead, colonial powers tended to engage with softer elements within the nationalist movement, perceiving them as less confrontational and thus less likely to incite widespread resistance. Nonetheless, recent scholarship, epitomized by works such as Kama Maclean's, has embarked on the task of unearthing the concealed history of these radical nationalists. By employing a diverse array of sources ranging from oral testimonies to visual representations and archival documents, historians are gradually constructing a more nuanced understanding of their praxis and their profound impact on India's struggle for liberation(Maclean, 2015).

The contributions of radical nationalists transcended mere acts of violence; they engendered a broader discourse on revolutionary politics and brought attention to the converging trajectories of nationalism and socialism in India. Their enduring charisma continues to reverberate within popular culture, underscoring the imperative of reassessing their role in shaping India's struggle for freedom.

3.5. Emergence of Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League

The Indian National Congress (henceforth INC) and the All-India Muslim League emerged as significant political entities in pre-WW I India, each with distinct origins shaped by the historical context of British colonial rule.

The INC, established in 1885, emerged directly in response to the widespread dissatisfaction prevalent among the Indian intelligentsia due to British oppression. AO Hume, a British civil servant, was strategically positioned by colonial authorities to establish an indigenous platform, providing a space for the grievances of Indian intelligentsia to be expressed, thus potentially averting a major rebellion or outburst. Under the leadership of softer elements of the freedom movement, such as Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee, the Congress embarked on a mission to secure representation for Indians within the colonial administrative apparatus. Their overarching objective was to challenge and undermine British hegemony by implementing institutional strategies and political manoeuvres(Moulton, 1985).

The emergence of the All-India Muslim League in 1906 marked a key moment in India's political development, offering a contrasting voice to the INC. The League's genesis can be traced back to the Shimla Deputation of October 1, 1906, where a delegation led by Aga Khan presented Muslim grievances and aspirations to Lord Minto, the Viceroy of India. This strategic move, orchestrated by Mr. Archbold of M.A.O. College in Aligarh, highlighting the pressing need for Muslim representation in the electoral process, beyond mere demographic considerations(Haider, 2010).

Formally established on December 30, 1906, the Muslim League's objectives were multifaceted. It aimed to promote the political interests of Indian Muslims while demonstrating loyalty to the British government, dispelling misconceptions about Muslim sentiments, safeguarding Muslim rights, and fostering inter-communal harmony(Dahlkvist et al., 2019). Initially, the League collaborated with the INC in the broader struggle against British rule. However, as communal tensions escalated, particularly amidst events like the Khilafat Movement and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim League, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, began to assert a distinct Muslim political identity. This shift was exemplified by Jinnah's articulation of the Fourteen Points in 1929, which solidified the League's stance on Muslim political rights and effectively severed its ties with the INC(Dahlkvist et al., 2019).

The 1930s witnessed further deterioration in Congress-League relations, exacerbated by disagreements over issue of the Communal Award of 1932, which widened the gap between Hindu and Muslim communities. Jinnah's leadership galvanized the League, positioning it as a formidable political force challenging Congress's dominance(Baumgartner et al., 1989). By the late 1930s, the Congress-League war was in full swing, characterized by sharp political antagonisms and competing visions for India's future. Amidst these tensions, the League's objectives evolved to reflect the changing political landscape shaped by British policies of divide and rule. Muhammad Ali Jinnah emerged as a central figure, advocating for Muslim rights and articulating the demand for a separate Muslim state(Samad, 1995).

Ultimately, while the INC embodied inclusive Indian nationalism, the Muslim League's trajectory highlighted the complexities of communal politics and the lasting impact of British colonial manipulation. The Lahore Resolution in 1940 marked a key moment when

the Muslim League formalized its demand for an independent Muslim nation(Panigrahi, 2004).

3.6. Political Environment of India in the 1930s and 1940s

The 1930s and 1940s were crucial in India's quest for independence from British colonial rule. During this period, India witnessed crucial nationalist movements and events that significantly shaped its trajectory toward freedom. India was amidst transformative change while navigating the struggle for independence amid the looming shadows of global conflict. Politically, colonial India simmered with discontent and fervent resistance against British rule. This era witnessed a growing sense of Indian identity and unity, transcending regional, linguistic, and religious divides. Communities united in their aspiration for freedom from British rule, demanding a united and independent India ensuring equal rights for all citizens. However, global conflicts added complexity to the situation. India was reluctantly involved in these struggles, with the British seeking more and more contributions from India regarding manpower and resources. British Initiatives like the 'Cripps Mission' and the 'August Offer' promised greater self-governance but fell short of India's aspirations for complete independence, leading to further unrest(History, 2014).

Socially, the struggle for independence resonated across society. Women broke traditional norms to participate in political activism, and the emergence of the Dalit movement, led by B.R. Ambedkar, demanded social and political equality for oppressed castes. Amidst the quest for independence, communal tensions occasionally erupted between Hindus and Muslims, leading to the demand for a separate Muslim state, adding a religious dimension to the socio-political landscape(Talbot, 1995).

In traversing this turbulent terrain, Gandhi developed a deeper understanding of India's complex sociopolitical landscape and honed his skill in crafting nonviolent strategies for leading a nonviolent independence movement, largely due to the guidance and strategic wisdom of experienced leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale. This time of intellectual exchange and mentorship was crucial in moulding Gandhi's leadership style and involvement within the nationalist movement. As Gandhi launched his quest to rouse the masses and rally support for the cause of independence, his collaboration with Gokhale laid the groundwork for his eventual efforts to lead nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience campaigns in pursuit of freedom.

Bose, in contrast to Gandhi's nonviolent approach, believed in more direct and forceful action against British rule. Bose's leadership in the INA, formed with the help of Axis powers during WW II, reflected his commitment to armed struggle. He sought international support for India's cause and aimed to liberate the country through military means. Bose's slogan, '*Give me blood, and I will give you freedom*,' encapsulated his belief in the necessity of sacrifice for the attainment of independence. Though his approach differed from Gandhi's(Thuy, 2021).

The dynamics between Gandhi, Nehru, and Bose were harmonious yet divergent in their strategies for achieving Indian independence. Gandhi's commitment to nonviolent resistance, Nehru's aspiration for a progressive and secular India, and Bose's militant approach collectively shaped the political terrain and expedited the downfall of British colonial rule in India. Another influential figure to emerge was Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose contributions significantly impacted the political narrative of the era. Jinnah, a proficient lawyer, initially engaged with the Indian National Congress, passionately advocating for Hindu-Muslim unity. However, his mounting disillusionment with the Congress' handling of communal issues led him to pivot towards safeguarding the rights and representation of Muslims within India's democratic framework. This ideological evolution fuelled his fervent campaign for a separate Muslim nation(Bolitho, 1981).

Jinnah's commitment to the concept of Pakistan grew stronger as he climbed to lead the All-India Muslim League. His uncompromising goal for a distinct Muslim state gathered traction, and he always intended to achieve a separate state for Muslims through skilled negotiations with both British authorities and Congress leaders. In contrast to Gandhi's nonviolent technique, Jinnah's plan was heavily anchored in constitutional and political manoeuvres. He underscored the critical importance of safeguarding minority rights, as well as the need for a separate Muslim nation to protect the subcontinent's Muslim community's distinct character(Mukhtar, 2018).

3.6.1. Civil Disobedience Movement.

The Civil Disobedience movement, was initiated in March 1930 under the leadership of Gandhi, which marked a crucial turning point in India's quest for independence. Rooted in defiance against the oppressive colonial rule of the British, the movement was catalysed by grievances such as the exclusion of Indian voices from the Simon Commission. Its

strategic objective was to challenge British dominance and affirm the right of Indians to self-rule. Symbolized by the declaration of Poorna Swaraj on December 31, 1929, the movement aimed to mobilize the masses and amplify their discontent against British authority. Through nonviolent resistance and strategic actions like the Salt Satyagraha, it galvanized widespread participation, raising international awareness and laying the groundwork for India's quest for freedom(Purushotham, 2020a). The 1940s was a crucial decade in India's struggle for independence, marked by significant historical events that reshaped its trajectory.

3.6.2. The Salt Satyagraha.

The '*Salt Satyagraha*', represents a seminal moment in India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule. Commencing on March 12, 1930, with Gandhi's symbolic act of making illegal salt from seawater in Dandi, Gujarat, the movement sparked widespread civil disobedience against British oppression. The defiance against the salt tax, a vital commodity for all Indians, culminated in the arrest of an estimated 60,000–100,000 participants, underscoring the depth of popular discontent with British rule. In addition to challenging British economic exploitation, the Salt March served as a platform to address broader social issues, including Hindu-Muslim unity and the oppressive caste system. Gandhi's inclusive approach, which encouraged participation from all segments of society, including the marginalized 'untouchable' caste, stirred controversy but also fostered a sense of national unity among Indians(Ananth, n.d.).

Despite the immediate goal of securing independence remaining elusive, the Salt Satyagraha dealt a significant blow to British authority. The brutal repression faced by satyagrahis, including beatings and imprisonment, not only failed to quell the movement but also undermined the credibility of the British Empire both domestically and internationally. This backlash forced the British to negotiate, resulting in the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin pact and opening the door for future discussions on Indian independence. Strategically, the Salt Satyagraha employed a multifaceted approach to civil resistance, encompassing nonviolent protest and persuasion, economic non-cooperation, political non-cooperation, and nonviolent intervention. The coordinated tactics, including the nonviolent invasion of the 'Dharasana' Salt Works, demonstrated the potency of civil resistance in challenging entrenched power structures(Naidu, 1986).

While the Salt Satyagraha did not immediately achieve its objectives, its enduring legacy is evident in India's evolution into the world's largest democracy. The spirit of nonviolent resistance continues to inspire social and political movements globally, underscoring the enduring relevance of Gandhi's principles of nonviolence in the pursuit of freedom and justice. However, a critical analysis raises questions about the effectiveness of the Salt Satyagraha in mobilizing the Indian populace and its ability to fundamentally weaken the colonial power beyond symbolic gestures(Kurtz, n.d.).

The nonviolent protesters during Salt Satyagraha were brutally beaten by the police, garnered international attention and condemnation. Though, the incident did not immediately lead to major concessions from the British, it changed the attitudes of Indians, promoting self-respect, self-reliance, and unity. It also influenced American civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., who adopted nonviolent resistance as a powerful tool for social change. Ultimately, the Salt March played a crucial role in the broader struggle for Indian independence and shifted the dynamics of colonial rule(Cortright, 1997).

3.6.3. The Great Depression.

The Great Depression lasting from 1929 to 1939, began with the infamous stock market crash on October 24, 1929, triggering a global economic crisis. In the United States, industrial production, wholesale prices, and real GDP plummeted, leading to widespread unemployment and social upheaval(Bruner & Miller, 2019). This turmoil spread worldwide, exacerbating economic challenges and contributing to political unrest, notably fostering conditions for the rise of fascism in Europe and the outbreak of the WW II.

In colonial India, the Great Depression worsened existing economic vulnerabilities, particularly impacting the agrarian sector. The sharp decline in agricultural prices, coupled with colonial policies refusing to devalue the rupee, sparked significant unrest among the peasantry. This discontent manifested through 'No Rent' campaigns and the formation of radical Kisan Sabhas, coinciding with Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement(Hall-Matthews, 2005). The agrarian unrest not only underscored economic grievances but also fuelled the momentum of the Indian freedom movement. The alignment of rural discontent with the Indian National Congress's political objectives bolstered the party's support base, culminating in its landslide victory in the 1936–37 provincial elections under the Government of India Act, 1935. This electoral success significantly enhanced the

Congress party's political influence, paving the way for further advancements in the struggle against British colonial rule(Tomlinson, 1976b).

3.6.4. Govt of India Act.

The Government of India Act of 1935 was a significant piece of legislation enacted by the British Indian Government on August 2, 1935. Its most notable feature was the introduction of the concept of an All-India Federation, which aimed to bring together the Provinces of British India and the Princely States under a unified system of governance. However, the Act had several provisions that protected British interests and limited the powers of the Indian legislature(Purushotham, 2020b). Under the Act, it was mandatory for the provinces of British India to join the proposed federation, while the participation of the Princely States was voluntary. The members representing the provinces were to be elected, while the representatives of the Princely States were to be nominated by their respective rulers. It is important to note that only a small fraction of the Indian population, approximately 14 percent, had the right to vote under this Act, limiting the democratic representation of the Indian people. The powers of the legislature established by the Act were confined and restricted, with no control over defence or foreign relations. This meant that the British retained significant authority and control over crucial aspects of governance, ensuring their continued dominance and limiting the autonomy of the Indian people(Muldoon, n.d.).

In terms of implications, the Government of India Act of 1935 served to protect British vested interests in India. It discouraged the emergence of national unity among Indians and fostered separation and communalism, exacerbating divisions along religious and ethnic lines. By restricting the powers of the Indian legislature and maintaining control over defence and foreign relations, the Act aimed to preserve British control and authority in the region. While many Indian nationalists disapproved of the Act, they decided to contest the elections held under its provisions as a means to resist British imperialism. In the 1937 elections, the Indian National Congress party emerged victorious and formed ministries in seven out of the total eleven provinces. This electoral success demonstrated widespread support for the Congress party and marked a significant step towards Indian self-governance and independence.

The Government of India Act of 1935 introduced the concept of an All-India Federation, but its provisions favored British interests and limited Indian autonomy(Walling, 2012). It protected British control, discouraged national unity, and fueled communal divisions. Despite these shortcomings, Indian nationalists participated in the elections and achieved significant success, signaling their determination to resist British imperialism and strive for self-governance(Chandra, B.& Mukherjee, M.& Mukherjee, 2008).

3.7. Social Climate of India in 1930s and 40s

The 1930s and 1940s in India were marked by severe economic struggles amidst British colonial rule. The exploitation of resources by the colonizers was compounded by the global economic downturn, known as the Great Depression, which profoundly impacted the Indian population under colonial rule(A. Mukherjee, 2008).

India's economy heavily relied on exporting raw materials to Western markets, particularly Britain, which suffered significantly during this period. Consequently, trade, industrial output, and agricultural prices experienced a steep decline. Agriculture, which was fundamental to the Indian economy then, encountered substantial challenges. Plummeting agricultural prices, coupled with exploitative practices by the British, moneylenders, and landlords, ensnared numerous rural families in a vicious cycle of debt and impoverishment. Natural calamities, including droughts and floods, exacerbated crop failures, amplifying the distress(T. Roy, 2018).

3.7.1. Economic Depletion.

The socio-economic landscape of India on the eve of WW II bore the scars of profound upheaval and deterioration, largely attributed to the enduring impact of British colonial rule. The policies and practices of the British administration inflicted severe blows to India's traditional economy and social fabric. The British rule spanning two centuries undermined India's self-reliant economy, which was grounded in ancient philosophical and tactical principles. Instead of integrating with Indian society, the colonial power exploited and plundered Indian resources, disrupting age-old economic structures. This exploitation, coupled with the introduction of one-way free trade, devastated Indian industries, particularly handicrafts, leading to widespread unemployment and economic distress.

3.7.2. Peasant Exploitation.

The British administration in India implemented oppressive land revenue demands and exploitative land settlement systems during the colonial era, notably the zamindary and '*Ryotwary*' systems. These policies inflicted severe hardship upon Indian peasants, exacerbating their already precarious situation. The substantial rise in land revenue burdens pushed many into deeper poverty, creating fertile ground for the intrusion of landlords, moneylenders, and merchants into rural communities. This economic exploitation entrenched social inequality and exacerbated the suffering of the agrarian population(Hamid Husain & High Sarwar, n.d.).

3.7.3. Agricultural Decline.

Under British rule, India's predominantly agrarian economy endured significant hardships, characterized by a confluence of factors that crippled agricultural productivity. Excessive land revenue demands, coupled with the prevalence of landlordism, exacerbated the plight of farmers, pushing many into a cycle of indebtedness. Moreover, overcrowding in agriculture and the fragmentation of land holdings further compounded these challenges, leading to stagnating yields and a decline in overall agricultural output. This multifaceted assault on the agricultural sector not only undermined the economic prosperity of rural communities but also entrenched social inequalities, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exploitation across the agrarian landscape of colonial India(Datta, 1989).

3.7.4. Industrial Suppression.

The traditional Indian industries faced a devastating blow with the inundation of inexpensive British machine-made goods during the colonial period. This deluge resulted in the erosion of centuries-old artisanal craftsmanship and the gradual decline of urban handicrafts, which were once the pride of India's cultural and economic landscape. Despite the emergence of a few modern capitalist industries under British patronage, their control remained predominantly in the hands of British capital, serving to stifle any indigenous industrial development. This economic landscape perpetuated a cycle of dependency, wherein India's industrial aspirations were subjugated to the interests of British colonialism, further deepening the economic disparity between the colonizers and the colonized(Seth, 2017).

3.7.5. Social Degradation.

The exploitative policies of the British administration in India cast a long shadow of suffering over the rural masses, plunging them into a cycle of poverty, unemployment, and famine. These policies deprived millions of people of basic necessities, perpetuating a state of destitution that hindered any semblance of progress. As indigenous industries dwindled under the weight of unfair competition and colonial exploitation, the economic woes of the populace deepened. This decline not only shattered livelihoods but also eroded the traditional social fabric built around the village economy. The once-thriving communal structures, where mutual support and cooperation flourished, gradually gave way to a landscape of despair and disintegration. The British exploitation not only robbed the people of their means of sustenance but also robbed them of their dignity, perpetuating a sense of backwardness that echoed through generations(Greenough, 1980).

3.7.6. Resource Drain.

The impact of British colonial policies on India's economic landscape was profound and multifaceted. Not only did colonial authorities drain the country of its wealth, diverting resources toward the construction of fortifications and military infrastructure, but they also imposed arbitrary home charges that further siphoned off India's precious resources. This relentless exploitation exacerbated existing economic strains and social dislocations, pushing the nation to the brink as WW II loomed on the horizon. Against this backdrop of economic distress and social upheaval, India found itself grappling with the enduring legacy of British colonial rule, which cast a long and oppressive shadow over its prospects for development and progress. The exploitation and plunder perpetrated by colonial powers not only deprived the Indian populace of its rightful resources but also stifled any attempts at indigenous economic empowerment, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment that would reverberate for generations to come(Peers, 2013).

The socio-economic conditions in India during the 1930s and 1940s, deeply rooted in British colonial rule and impaired by global economic turmoil, inflicted profound hardships on its people. The convergence of exploitative policies, natural disasters, and the erosion of traditional economic structures created a crisis that permeated every aspect of society. This era was marked by economic distress, social upheaval, and the enduring

legacy of colonial exploitation, casting a shadow over the nation's prospects for development and progress.

3.8. India at WW II: An Imposed Chapter

India's involvement in the Second WW, a conflict not of its own making but one in which it played a key role over a period of six tumultuous years, was substantial and multifaceted. Indian soldiers traversed vast distances, from the jungles of Burma to the deserts of North Africa, and from the streets of Singapore to the hills of Italy. Their sacrifices were immense, with nearly 90,000 Indian servicemen laying down their lives and many more returning homes scarred by the horrors of battle(Mazumder, 2012; K. Roy et al., 2012).

Yet, beyond the valour of its soldiers, India's contribution to the war effort extended far beyond the battlefield. The country emerged as a crucial logistical and industrial hub for Allied operations in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Its factories churned out weapons and equipment, while its fields produced food to sustain Allied forces across the globe. India's financial support was substantial, making it one of Britain's largest wartime creditors(S. R. I. N. Raghavan, n.d.). However, amidst the heroism and sacrifice, the story of India's war remained largely obscured by the passage of time. The immense human toll exacted on the Indian home front, where millions endured hardship and privation, was often forgotten. The complexities of India's role in a conflict were not of its choosing, and the debates surrounding its participation faded from memory. In hindsight, the prelude to India's involvement in WW II serves as a stark reminder of the far-reaching consequences of geopolitical decisions made in distant capitals(Foster, 2005). It underscores the enduring significance of remembering and reflecting upon the events that shaped our collective past, even as they recede into the annals of history.

3.9. The Unilateral Declaration of WW II by Linlithgow.

In the quiet of a Sunday evening, on September 3, 1939, a solemn broadcast echoed across the airwaves of All India Radio, marking an unprecedented turn in history. Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, delivered a terse message from his summer retreat in Shimla, announcing that India was now at war with Germany, alongside the British Empire. This historic decision, thrusting India into the maelstrom of global conflict, was made without consultation with Indian leadership or institutions.

Immediately after India was declared at war against the Axis, Gandhi embarked on a journey to Shimla, invited by the viceroy, Lord Linlithgow. However, the backdrop of this seemingly diplomatic gesture was anything but harmonious. The viceroy's unilateral declaration of war had stirred a cauldron of political discontent across India. The Congress and its supporters were irked by India being dragged into a conflict that was not their own and that too without consultation. Their resentment stemmed from the stark contrast between desire for autonomy and the relentless grip of colonial rule(S. Raghavan, 2017).

After meeting with Linlithgow, Gandhi chose to be more cooperative, even though some of his party members wanted him to stay away from collaboration. He shared the feelings of England and France, saying, 'I couldn't bear to think of London being destroyed.' Gandhi was deeply touched when he imagined the damage to the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey. He clarified that his concern was not solely for 'India's liberation'. He believed this would come naturally, not through England's ruin. The staunch advocate of non-violence remarked, 'It seems Herr Hitler recognizes only brute force,' emphasizing that Indians must collectively determine 'India's role in this dreadful drama.' Gandhi's sympathy for the British cause stemmed from a desire to avoid the destruction of nations and to find a path towards Indian independence without causing harm to England(Ramakrishnan, 2021).

The Government of India Act of 1935, ostensibly positioned as a move towards self-governance, in reality, aimed to confine the Congress to provincial politics, thereby diminishing its influence at the national level. The Act's division of powers between the central and provincial governments played into Linlithgow's strategy, enabling him to manipulate the Congress's aspirations for autonomy to serve British interests effectively(Sinha, 2006).

Moreover, Linlithgow had a towering personality, both in stature and resolve; he had little intention of appeasing the Congress. Throughout his tenure, he maintained a chilly distance from Congress leaders, earning himself the moniker 'Great Mogul' among Indian nationalists. Behind his stern façade lay a cunning strategy to assert colonial dominance, leveraging Indian resources and exploiting the internal divisions within the Congress to his advantage(Akbar, 2020). Amidst this fractured political landscape, the Congress found itself torn between opposing Nazi aggression and asserting India's independence. The party's wavering stance on the war reflected its struggle to balance these conflicting

imperatives. However, Linlithgow's shrewd manoeuvring extended to arm-twisting Gandhi, subtly coercing him to align with colonial interests. Despite Gandhi's principles of non-violence and independence, he became unwittingly entangled in Linlithgow's schemes, serving as a tool to advance the Viceroy's agenda. Recognizing the internal divisions within the Congress, Lord Linlithgow skilfully advanced his colonial agenda by securing Indian support for the impending war, utilizing Gandhi as a strategic instrument, fully aware that the nation would inevitably rally behind him(Whittington, 2016).

3.10. The Ideological Clash of Violence vs. Non-Violence (Gandhi vs. Bose)

3.10.1. Conflicting Ideologies.

The ideological divergence within the Indian independence movement, epitomized by Gandhi and Bose, revolved around the central dichotomy of non-violence versus violence. Gandhi, a prominent lawyer and freedom fighter, staunchly advocated non-violence as the primary means to combat British oppression, while Bose, a radical nationalist, favored a more violent approach to India's liberation. Gandhi's commitment to non-violence stemmed from his profound philosophy, evolving from 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God.' He believed in the attainment of truth through non-violence, asserting that harming a single human being was tantamount to disrespecting the divine powers within all. This core principle guided his political approach and defined his doctrine of '*Ahimsa*'(Thuy, 2021).

On the contrary, Bose emerged as a radical thinker whose ideological stance transcended the Gandhian paradigm. He advocated for a more assertive approach to India's struggle for independence, notably expressing the belief that the most opportune moment for launching an armed uprising against British colonial rule was when the empire was most thinly stretched, particularly amidst the tumult of WW II. Bose's acumen in geopolitical affairs got substantiated by his prescient anticipation of a European conflict involving Britain following the Munich Pact of 1938. Sensing an advantageous window for India to exploit Britain's preoccupation, he embarked on a concerted effort to mobilize resources and support for a national liberation movement in alignment with the impending global conflagration(Sathiyamoorthy, 2010).

The seminal divergence between Gandhi and Bose came to a head during the Tripuri session of the Indian National Congress in March 1939. Serving as the Congress President,

Bose put forth a bold proposal; a six-month ultimatum to the British administration, demanding immediate independence for India. However, Gandhi and Nehru voiced vehement opposition to this proposition, which ultimately led to Bose's expulsion from the party(Gandhi & Bose, n.d.). This schism underscored fundamental disparities in their perspectives regarding the urgency of India's struggle and the strategic approach toward confronting British hegemony. Bose's subsequent departure from India in January 1941 marked a pivotal departure from Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha, symbolizing a divergence in strategic vision and ideological orientation within the Indian nationalist movement(Kumar Chaturvedi, 2024).

Seeking assistance from the Axis powers, Bose aimed to organize an armed struggle from outside India to permanently overthrow British imperialism(K. Roy, 2017). This marked a clear departure from Gandhi's commitment to non-violence and peaceful resistance. Despite these profound ideological differences, it is crucial to acknowledge that Gandhi and Bose, as individuals, were driven by a sincere commitment to their respective philosophies. Bose's radical thinking and military approach did not negate the mutual respect they harboured for each other. Bose's escape to Germany left a lasting impression on Gandhi, who admired Bose's love for India, as evidenced by Bose referring to Gandhi as the '*Father of the Nation*'(Review & 2007, 2007).

3.10.2. The Shifting Ideological Landscape.

Gandhi and Bose's relationship exemplifies leadership dynamics and ideological divergence within the Indian independence movement. Despite these differences, they shared mutual respect. Gandhi acknowledged Bose's pragmatism, and Bose admired Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence. Disagreements, particularly over the use of violence, did not diminish their respect for each other(Gupta, 2015).

Bose's actions during WW II, including his broadcasts from abroad, significantly influenced Gandhi's perspective(J. B. Bhattacharjee, 1989). This influence was particularly evident during the Quit India Movement of 1942, which saw Gandhi shift towards a more assertive stance. Gandhi's evolution from a proponent of nonviolence to an advocate of uncompromising struggle reflected the impact of Bose's unwavering stance and the changing global context(NA, 2016).

Their relationship underscores the complexity of leadership and the potential for convergence despite ideological differences. It highlights mutual respect amidst contrasting approaches towards achieving Indian independence. Gandhi's evolving views during the Quit India Movement signify the profound influence Bose had on him, demonstrating the dynamic nature of leadership within transformative social movements.

3.11. Backdrop of WW II in Northeast India

The pre-WW II era in northeastern India, particularly in Manipur and the Naga Hills, was marked by the imposition of colonial rule, reshaping local governance structures and societal dynamics. The influence of the British Empire intensified in Manipur during the late 19th century, introducing administrative reforms that clashed with indigenous traditions, while a similar scenario unfolded in the Naga Hills as British authority expanded, leading to intricate interactions between indigenous Naga tribes and colonial administrators, disrupting traditional socio-political systems, and fostering tensions for future conflicts. Despite these changes, cultural diversity flourished, with diverse ethnic groups such as the Meiteis, Nagas, and Kukis coexisting in Manipur, each maintaining distinct languages and customs. Similarly, the Naga tribes in the Naga Hills upheld unique rituals, languages, and social structures, fostering a rich blend of cultural exchange and influence despite their differences. Despite the colonial presence, efforts to preserve local governance and cultural identities persisted, with Manipur retaining elements of its traditional governance alongside British administrative structures and the Naga tribes vehemently defending their autonomy against external pressures(modernity, 2024).

The socio-economic landscape of the locals underwent profound transformations during WW II, which served as a watershed moment, awakening them to the realities of the modern world. During the conflict, many locals fled to the jungles and fields, disrupting the traditional socio-cultural life of villages(Naorem, 2020). Post-war, traditional institutions lost their relevance, giving way to new social organizations, and the disruption in traditional community life became evident. Previously, communal activities revolved around agricultural cycles, with everyone in the village engaging in similar tasks. However, individual activities became unpredictable post-war, signalling the erosion of a community-based society.

As a wartime measure, substantial funds were injected into the hills through road construction and supply contracts, providing employment opportunities for many inhabitants. Government relief efforts post-battle further contributed to the influx of money, ultimately shifting the socio-economic status of the people. Understanding this process of change requires a deeper examination of traditional Naga society, which sets the stage for comprehending the subsequent shifts in socio-economic dynamics.

3.12. Pre-War Socioeconomic and Cultural Landscape

On the eve of WW II, the northeastern region of India found itself intricately woven into the fabric of the global conflict, experiencing a significant impact on its pre-war socioeconomic and cultural landscape. The region was characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnicities, languages, and traditions. The pre-war period witnessed a complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural dynamics that set the stage for the impending global upheaval.

Socioeconomically, the northeastern states were primarily agrarian societies with a strong emphasis on traditional practices. Assam, for instance, was known for its tea plantations, and the tea industry played a pivotal role in the region's economy. The Manipuri society was marked by its unique cultural identity and agrarian lifestyle, while Naga Hills was predominantly inhabited by tribal communities with distinct social structures. The region was also characterized by diverse trade routes, connecting it to neighbouring countries and facilitating the exchange of goods and ideas(Casino, 1997).

Culturally, the northeastern states were home to a myriad of indigenous communities, each contributing to the vibrant mosaic of the region. Assam, with its mix of Assamese, Bodo, and various tribal cultures, showcased a rich diversity in traditions and festivals. Manipur, known for its classical dance forms and traditional rituals, was a cultural hub in the region. Naga Hills, with its indigenous Naga tribes, added to the cultural heterogeneity of the northeast(Baharul Islam, 2022).

As the threat of WW II loomed, the region's geopolitical significance became increasingly pronounced. Assam, with its strategic location, emerged as a crucial hub for the Allied forces. The construction of the Stilwell Road, connecting India to China through Burma (now Myanmar), underscored the region's importance in the war effort. The influx of

Allied troops, refugees, and the establishment of military bases brought about significant changes to the socioeconomic landscape, impacting local communities(Guyot-Réchard, 2017).

3.13. British Imperial Policies in North-East India

From the beginning of British colonial endeavours in Northeast India to the brink of WW II, a complex web of imperial policies emerged, indicating a concerted attempt to consolidate power, utilize resources, and negotiate the region's rich cultural and ethnic mosaic(Wouters & Subba, 2023). The conquest of different princely kingdoms and areas during the early stages of 19th-century development laid the groundwork for a colonial administration that preferred indirect authority, frequently hiring local elites as middlemen. While purportedly preserving local autonomy, this strategy suited the broader purpose of securing British interests in the Indian subcontinent's militarily critical northeastern boundary.

Economically, the region's bountiful natural resources, including tea, timber, and later oil, were focal points of British exploitation. Assam, emerging as a pivotal centre for tea plantations, made significant contributions to the British economy. However, beneath the economic gains lay exploitative labour practices and a hierarchical social structure perpetuating disparities among various communities, encompassing indigenous populations and migrant labourers(Parsons, 1999).

Culturally and administratively, British policies aimed at assimilating the diverse ethnic groups and tribes into a unified colonial framework. The imposition of Western education, legal systems, and administrative structures sought to integrate these regions into the broader colonial apparatus. This integration often encountered resistance, as local cultures and traditional systems clashed with the imposition of colonial norms(Young, 1979). The arrival of Western missionaries and the establishment of churches added another layer to the cultural transformation. Missionary activities, coupled with the spread of Christianity, further impacted the socio-cultural fabric of the region(Kurikilamkatt, 2023).

Geopolitically, the strategic importance of Northeast India became increasingly apparent as tensions escalated in Asia on the eve of WW II. The region's proximity to countries like China and Burma, coupled with its resource wealth, compelled the British to fortify their

military presence, establishing bases and infrastructure as pre-emptive measures against potential threats, particularly from Japan(K. Roy, 2016).

As WW II loomed, the culmination of these imperial policies depicted a region marked by economic exploitation, cultural assimilation endeavours, and strategic military preparations. The intricate interplay of these policies set the stage for profound transformations in the socio-political dynamics of Northeast India as the global conflict approached. The amalgamation of facts and figures underscores the complex history that shaped the region during this critical period.

3.14. The Complexities of Assam's Colonial Legacy

In contrast to the remote hill districts, the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys of Assam were more developed, with significant economic activities such as tea plantations and an oil refinery in Digboi. These regions were culturally diverse and the plain region of Assam was more integrated with the cultural and political influences of mainland India(Dikshit, 2014). The formation of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee (APCC) in 1920 provided a platform for the youth to participate in the mass-based programs of the Indian National Congress(Sarma & Sharma, 2022). Many individuals from Assam pursued higher education in Bengal and played key roles in provincial politics upon their return. Notable figures like Sir Muhammad Saadulla and Gopinath Bardoloi emerged as influential leaders during WW II despite their differing ideologies and political affiliations(A. Bhattacharjee, 1993). However, within the larger Indian context, Assam was often overlooked and considered peripheral. Philip Mason's perception of Assam and Burma as distinct from the rest of India reflects a common misunderstanding of the region(Inks, 2019).

Assam's history under colonial rule traces back to the early 19th century, when the British intervened to expel Burmese invaders. Post signing of the Treaty of 'Yandaboo' in 1826, Assam came under the control of the British EIC. The discovery of indigenous tea plants in Upper Assam led to the establishment of the Assam Company in 1839, followed by the Jorehaut (Jorhat) Tea Company in 1855(Hall, 1981). The tea industry's growth faced numerous challenges, including hostile terrain, diseases, and communication difficulties. British planters relied on cheap indentured labor, leading to the mistreatment and exploitation of workers. Despite the transformative impact of the tea industry, indigenous elites were marginalized, with minimal local ownership of tea estates(S. N. . Singh &

Narain, 2006). Most profits were repatriated abroad, causing economic grievances among local communities(Kumar, n.d.). Efforts to secure financial benefits for Assam, such as retaining export duties from tea and royalties from Assam oil, were advocated by figures like Sir Muhammad Saadulla and Sir Nicholas Dodd Beatson-Bell. However, these efforts faced significant challenges, reflecting broader disparities in colonial economic policies.

The budgetary challenges faced by the Assam government stemmed from limited revenue sources, primarily land revenue, excise, and forests, placing a heavy burden on the peasantry(Pathak, 2010). Agriculture investments were minimal, and rural infrastructure, particularly transport and communication, was inadequate. Natural disasters compounded the plight of the rural populace, with diseases like malaria, smallpox, and dysentery exacerbating the situation. Landholding patterns, characterized by annual leases, increased debt burdens on peasant proprietors, often forcing them into tenancy arrangements. To alleviate economic pressures, the government adopted migration from Bengal, particularly from the Mymensingh district, to settle in Assam. These migrants, primarily Muslims, cultivated previously uncultivated char lands but faced challenges such as disease and dependence on middlemen for crop sales. Tensions arose as migrants encroached on tribal lands, leading to segregation measures and occasional conflicts(Dikshit, 2014).

The 1937 provincial elections in Assam initially fostered optimism among the populace, fuelled by promises of increased autonomy and local representation. However, the pursuit of autonomy soon unveiled the divisive nature of Indian politics, with a scramble for ministerial positions overshadowing regional concerns. Sir Muhammad Saadulla assumed office as Assam's first premier on April 1, 1937, in a coalition ministry, despite his initial distance from the provincial Muslim League(Purushotham, 2021). The Provincial Muslim League's limited success in the elections, securing only 9 out of 34 seats reserved for the Muslim community, reflected its nascent presence in Assam's political landscape. Fundamental differences between Muslim communities in the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys further complicated its influence(Chadda, 2000; Jaffrelot, 2001). Saadulla, with his fiscal acumen and advocacy for Assam's financial interests, garnered respect but remained politically isolated due to his non-alignment with any party ideology. Saadulla's political isolation made him susceptible to overtures from various political factions, including the Muslim League led by Abdul Matin Chaudhury. Despite initial refusals,

Saadulla eventually aligned with the League, leading to the reconstitution of his ministry. However, internal and external pressures forced him to resign from office(Baruah, 1999).

Meanwhile, Gopinath Bardoloi of the provincial Congress party sought to form a coalition ministry, despite resistance from the party leadership. Bardoloi's strategic manoeuvres, including seeking support from Subhas Chandra Bose, eventually led to the formation of a Congress-led coalition ministry in Assam, overcoming internal divisions and external pressures. However, its existence was brief, lasting a mere 14 months.

Concurrently, in Europe, an international crisis loomed large. On September 3, 1939, Great Britain issued a historic declaration of war against Nazi Germany, marking the failure of the policy of appeasement. Shortly thereafter, the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, announced via a nationwide broadcast on All India Radio that India was also entering the war against Germany(Charman, 2009). This proclamation urged all citizens to support the war effort indiscriminately, regardless of caste, creed, race, or political affiliation. Almost immediately, the 'Defense of India Ordinance' was enacted, granting the govment authority to curtail provincial autonomy, expedite the war effort through any necessary means, and suppress dissent without trial(Halliday et al., 2012).

The unilateral decision by the Viceroy, made without consulting the Congress ministries, came as a shock to politically aware Indians, particularly those in the seven out of eleven provinces of British India where Congress was firmly established. Many perceived this move as a belittlement of India's importance and a disregard for the opinions of its people. Within the Congress party, there arose internal conflict in formulating a response to the situation. Initially, Gandhi expressed readiness to cooperate with the British war effort, offering unconditional support and assistance in recruiting Indians into the army, as he had done during the First WW. However, Gandhi's stance did not garner universal support within the Congress leadership. Over the ensuing two months, party leaders engaged in deliberations, grappling with challenging decisions(Jha, 2018).

While vehemently opposing the fascist ideology underlying Nazi aggression, the Congress leadership also questioned the inconsistencies and contradictions in British foreign policy, as articulated by Nehru in his travels to Europe during the 1930s. Nehru criticized Britain's betrayal of Abyssinia, its non-intervention in Spain, and its appeasement of fascist powers such as Italy and Germany. The Congress party remained committed to democratic

principles yet faced the paradox of fighting for democracy while being denied it themselves(Brecher, 2016). Ultimately, after weeks of intense discussion, a moderated proposal of conditional cooperation was formulated. This proposal stipulated that India would support the war effort, contingent upon a commitment to absolute freedom and the right to frame its own constitution through a constituent assembly at the war's conclusion, accompanied by immediate power-sharing at the centre(Tomlinson, 1976a).

Despite its commitment to democratic principles, the Congress party found itself in a dilemma during the pre-independence era; how could it advocate for democracy when it was itself denied democratic governance? Nonetheless, the party's primary objective remained the attainment of India's freedom. Following extensive deliberations in October, a cautiously formulated proposal for conditional cooperation was crafted. This proposal hinged upon the clear assurance of 'absolute freedom at the end of the war and the liberty to frame her own constitution by means of a constituent assembly' coupled with an immediate sharing of power at the central level. However, the response from the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, was unequivocally dismissive. On October 17, he reiterated the British stance, emphasizing Dominion Status as the ultimate goal of British policy and the continuation of the Government of India Act until the war's conclusion. In response, the Congress Working Committee convened at Wardha on October 22nd and 23rd, 1939, mandating the resignation of all Congress ministries by 31st October 1939. Subsequently, with the enforcement of Section 93 of the Government of India Act, governors assumed full authority in seven Congress-governed provinces. Meanwhile, Muslim League ministries were installed in the remaining five provinces. Notably, this included the establishment of a Muslim League ministry in the North West Frontier Province, previously under Congress rule since 1937.

Narendra Singh Sarila, the Aide-de-Camp (ADC) to Lord Mountbatten, India's final viceroy, offered insights into this historical juncture:

> *Something had obviously happened between the 4th and the 26th September, 1939. And that was Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Jinnah had met the Viceroy immediately after Gandhiji on September 4. While Gandhiji had offered tears and sympathy, Jinnah offered the Viceroy the means to win the war and a clear compact. He pledged 'the loyalty of the Muslim community everywhere........ and then, with reference to the Congress ministries in the provinces, told the*

Viceroy, turn them out at once. Nothing else will bring them their senses(Husain & Pakistan, 2014).

Jinnah's assertion regarding partition as the sole solution to the political deadlock underscored mounting tensions. Following the resignation and subsequent detention of Congress ministries post-1942, Jinnah adeptly exploited the resulting political vacuum to elevate the League's standing in Indian politics. This calculated manoeuvre yielded substantial gains, extending even to regions like Bengal and Assam, where the League's influence had been previously minimal. However, the Congress Working Committee's call for resignations incited dissent within Assam's party hierarchy. While some, led by Muhammad Tayyebulla, endorsed adherence to the party's directives, others, notably Bardoloi, expressed reservations. Bardoloi's hesitance emanated from legitimate apprehensions, including the resurgence of Abdul Matin Chaudhury, advocating for heightened League sway in Assam, and the influence of Abdul Hamid Khan, alias Bhasani, among Muslim immigrants promising land in the region(Pandey, 1969).

In navigating these complexities, Bardoloi pursued a diplomatic approach by proposing an alternative coalition ministry committed to Congress's ideals. Despite endeavours to underscore Assam's distinctive challenges, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the Congress leadership remained unmoved, culminating in the resignation of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee on November 15, 1939. Concurrently, efforts unfolded in Shillong to establish a new ministry under Saadulla's leadership. Despite lacking a majority, the coalition ministry received endorsement from Governor Robert Reid, thereby reinstating Saadulla to power. Reflecting on the tumultuous events, Gandhi conceded the imprudence of Bardoloi's resignation, acknowledging Subhas Bose's reservations and emphasizing Assam's autonomy in decision-making. The ramifications of Congress's estrangement from mainstream politics during the war were profound, facilitating the consolidation of Muslim League influence under Jinnah's leadership in eastern India. The resultant instability, compounded by successive ministries and a brief period of governor's rule, rendered Assam vulnerable amid the upheaval of wartime(Misra, 2018).

Indian political leaders had diverse motivations for either supporting or abstaining from the British war effort. Saadulla, in his second term as premier, demonstrated unwavering support for the Raj by establishing a Provincial War Aid Committee with branches across all district headquarters. This committee, led by Saadulla himself and comprised of notable

figures like Abdul Matin Chaudhury and Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri, convened regularly to strategize methods for expediting collections for the war fund. However, Saadulla encountered challenges when, in July 1940, he unilaterally donated one lakh rupees from the provincial treasury to the Viceroy's war fund without consulting the legislative assembly. This action drew sharp criticism from the opposition, which accused Saadulla of unconstitutional behaviour, citing Section 150 of the Government of India Act(Chander, 1987).

Despite these criticisms, Saadulla remained resolute in his commitment to supporting Britain, characterizing the donation as a gesture of sympathy and moral support. He further reflected on the grim consequences of the war in Europe, emphasizing the importance of standing in solidarity with Britain:

> *'With the collapse of France and the evacuation from Dunkirk, the British government is faced with dire prospects of an attack from German hordes... With voluntary contributions, Assam has been able to present four fighter planes to the British air forces, and with this amount of rupees one lakh, two fighter planes could be bought and used by the British government for the defense of their country, incidentally for India, and so for Assam*(SAIGAL, 2024)*.'*

Saadulla expressed concern over the criticism aimed at his pro-war stance, given the widespread support shown by regions across the country through donations and enlistment in the armed forces. He questioned why Assam was singled out for scrutiny when other provinces were also involved in constitutional matters:

> *'The Punjab Premier the other day said they were the sword arm of India, Bengal, from what appears in the press reports, we find that the province is just now placed in such a tight corner that they are thinking of placing a sales tax on their statute books*(SAIGAL, 2024)*.'*

3.15. Rani Gaidinliu and the 'Heraka' Movement

Rani Gaidinliu, played a key role in the fight for independence, particularly in Northeast India, where her indomitable spirit and resolute leadership rallied her people against the

repressive colonial regime and the insidious influence of Christian missionaries. Born into the Zeliangrong community, Gaidinliu's journey began when she joined Haipou Jadonang's movement for '*Makam Gwangdi*,' challenging British colonial authority and advocating for the preservation of indigenous beliefs and autonomy. At the age of 14, she assumed leadership of the movement after Jadonang's execution, and became a beacon of hope for her people, galvanizing them to resist the oppressive forces of colonialism and missionary intrusion. Under her guidance, the Zeliangrong movement evolved into a formidable force for social justice and independence, driven by a fervent desire to protect their age-old tribal beliefs and way of life from external encroachment(Niumai, 2022).

British anthropologist Ursula Graham, recounting the clash at Hangrum, where a band of followers under Rani Gaidinliu encountered the troops of Assam Rifles in the North Cachar Hills on 16th February 1932, observed that the Zemei Naga warriors, armed with dao and spears, were no match for the well-equipped troops. However, she noted that these tribal warriors, inspired by their leader, believed fervently in her power to protect and lead them to victory. Gaidinliu had assured her warriors that the bullets of the Assam Rifles would transform into water. Graham Bower's commentary, laced with sarcasm, reflects on the seemingly improbable nature of Gaidinliu's assertion in the face of overwhelming odds: -

> '*It would be really interesting to know now whether she really believed in her own powers. At any rate, Hangrum (who could, had they been attacking rationally, have crept up at night through the dead ground and rushed the post easily), made a mass charge in daylight, down the only slop on which the sepoys commanded a field of fire. It will always a mystery to those who know the place why three times the number were not killed. When the first volley, fired over their heads, brought them howling on encouraged, the next was sent into them at thirty yards range, with the obvious consequences*(Bowden, 2020)*'*

Gaidinliu's leadership marked a crucial chapter in the Zeliangrong struggle for liberation, resonating across the hills and valleys of the Northeast. Her defiance against British tyranny and missionary intrusion earned her a legendary status, entrenched in mystique and folklore. Her strategic acumen and the unwavering support of her followers confounded British forces, who struggled to contain the uprising led by this young but

determined freedom fighter. The British authorities, alarmed by the growing momentum of the rebellion, intensified their efforts to suppress the movement. Troops were mobilized, and a relentless hunt for Gaidinliu ensued. However, her elusive nature and the untiring support of her followers continued to thwart their efforts. In the face of overwhelming odds, Gaidinliu and her compatriots stood as symbols of resistance, defiant in their pursuit of liberation and the preservation of their tribal identity.

Gaidinliu's Heraka movement, while facing opposition from Christian converts and traditional believers, represented not only a religious revival but also a political awakening. She sought to unite her people against colonial oppression and missionary intrusion, advocating for the preservation of their indigenous beliefs and autonomy. She envisioned a future where her people could determine their own destiny, free from the shackles of colonialism and religious imperialism(Longkumer, n.d.).