Chapter 2: India's Long Road to Independence

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Exercise 2.1 — True or False

Q1 True or False: Right from its inception, the Indian National Congress called for India's independence.

False. The Indian National Congress began in 1885 as a forum that expressed full faith in the 'providential character' of British rule and pledged 'unswerving allegiance to the British Crown'. It initially called only for greater Indian participation in governance and some reforms, not for independence. The demand for Swaraj was raised later, and 'Purna Swaraj' (complete independence) was formally adopted only in December 1929 at the Lahore session.

Q2 True or False: Bal Gangadhar Tilak turned a Shivaji festival into a popular event.

True. Bal Gangadhar Tilak turned both the traditional Ganesh Chaturthi and the Shivaji festival into popular public events, using religious and patriotic symbols to awaken people and encourage them to stand up against British oppression.

Q3 True or False: The Ghadar Movement of 1914–15 aimed to start a mutiny within the British Indian Army while British troops were busy with World War I.

True. The Ghadar Movement was a daring attempt by Indian revolutionaries to trigger a pan-Indian mutiny within the British Indian Army during World War I (1914–1918). The Ghadar Party, founded by Indian migrants in North America including Lala Hardayal and Sohan Singh Bhakna, intended to use the opportunity of Britain being occupied with the war to start an armed uprising inside India.

Q4 True or False: Vallabhbhai Patel earned the title 'Sardar' for his leadership during the Satyagraha agitation in Gujarat.

True. Vallabhbhai Patel led the Bardoli movement of 1928 for peasant rights in Gujarat, which was one of the most successful grassroots movements in the freedom struggle. It was for this leadership that Mahatma Gandhi bestowed upon him the title 'Sardar', meaning 'leader' or 'chief'. He thus came to be known as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Q5 True or False: The Kakori train robbery of 1925 was carried out to fund the activities of the Hindustan Republican Association.

True. The Hindustan Republican Association (HRA), led by Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan and Chandrashekhar Azad, robbed a train at Kakori (a village near Lucknow) that carried government money in order to fund their revolutionary activities. This action led to a massive crackdown and the execution of Bismil, Khan, and several others.

Q6 True or False: The 'Do or Die' call was given by Mahatma Gandhi during the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920.

False. Gandhi gave the 'Do or Die' call during the Quit India Movement in August 1942, not during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920. The Non-Cooperation Movement was launched in 1920 with Gandhi's promise of Swaraj within a year if people adhered strictly to nonviolence; the Quit India Movement demanded that the British leave India at once.

Q7 True or False: B.R. Ambedkar and Gandhi were in total agreement regarding the issue of 'separate electorates' for Dalits.

False. Ambedkar and Gandhi disagreed on this issue. Ambedkar believed that keeping separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was the only way to ensure their political voice. Gandhi, on the other hand, feared this would permanently divide Hindu society and began a 'fast unto death' in protest. A compromise was eventually reached in the Poona Pact, which increased reserved seats rather than granting separate electorates.

Q8 True or False: Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India in 1942 because Winston Churchill supported immediate independence for India.

False. Churchill did not support immediate independence for India. He sent Stafford Cripps to India under pressure to seek India's support for the British war effort during World War II. The 'Cripps Mission' offered only dominion status after the war ended, not immediate independence, and included a provision that provinces could opt out of post-war India. Most Indian leaders, including Gandhi, rejected the offer as insufficient.

Q9 True or False: Subhas Chandra Bose raised an army during his stay in Germany.

False. Bose escaped to Germany in early 1941 and spent almost two years there seeking support from the anti-British forces, but he did not raise his army there. He later travelled to Japan and reached Singapore in 1943, where he formed the Indian National Army (INA) from Indian prisoners of war and volunteers and declared the formation of the Azad Hind government.

Q10 True or False: The Radcliffe Line, which divided India and Pakistan, was announced a few weeks before Independence Day.

True. Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer unfamiliar with India, was given just five weeks to draw the new borders. The Radcliffe Line, which split Punjab and Bengal, was announced on August 17, 1947 — that is, two days after Independence Day on August 15. So the boundary line was drawn in the weeks leading up to Independence and announced just after it, meaning millions suddenly found themselves on the 'wrong' side almost overnight.

Exercise 2.2 — Who Am I?

Q1 Who Am I? Known as the 'Lion of Punjab', I was severely injured during a brutal lathi charge while protesting against the Simon Commission.

Lala Lajpat Rai. He led a nonviolent march in Lahore in October 1928 against the all-British Simon Commission. The police brutally lathi-charged the protesters, and Lala Lajpat Rai was badly injured. Despite his injuries, he addressed a meeting the same evening. He passed away two weeks later, which further inflamed national sentiment.

Q2 Who Am I? I famously declared, 'Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it!' I used the Kesari newspaper and festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi to unite people against British rule.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He used his Marathi newspaper Kesari to write strongly against colonial oppression. He transformed the Ganesh Chaturthi and Shivaji festivals into popular political events to awaken people. He came to be known as 'Lokmanya' (revered by the people) and was a founding leader of the Nationalist faction of the Congress.

Q3 Who Am I? I was a leader of the Nationalist faction of the Congress. In the daily Bande Mataram, I wrote on the need for India to attain absolute autonomy.

Aurobindo Ghose (Sri Aurobindo). He joined Bipin Chandra Pal's English daily Bande Mataram and soon took charge of the publication, writing powerfully on the need for India to attain absolute autonomy. He was later arrested in the Alipore Bomb Case but was acquitted. After another impending arrest in 1910, he moved to Pondicherry and dedicated himself to spiritual philosophy, becoming known as Sri Aurobindo.

Q4 Who Am I? I earned my nickname 'Bagha' after wrestling a tiger with my bare hands. I was a revolutionary leader who died in a gunfight while waiting for a shipment of German arms to start an uprising.

Jatin Mukherjee, nicknamed Bagha Jatin ('Bagha' means 'tiger'). He was a leader of the Anushilan Samiti who organised the reception of a massive shipment of German arms as part of the 'German Plot' during World War I. When the authorities discovered the plan, he and his companions hid in the jungles of Balasore. On 9 September 1915, he fought a 75-minute gunbattle with British police and died the next day from severe wounds.

Q5 Who Am I? I organised the daring attempt to throw a bomb at the Viceroy in 1912. I later escaped to Japan, where I spent years working to organise a movement from there.

Rash Behari Bose. He was involved in organising the 1912 bomb attack on Viceroy Charles Hardinge as his ceremonial procession entered Delhi. He managed to escape from India and reach Japan, where he would later lay the foundation of the Indian National Army — which was subsequently reorganised and led by Subhas Chandra Bose.

Q6 Who Am I? I was martyred at a young age after an attempt on the life of a British judge.

Khudiram Bose. In April 1908, Khudiram Bose (just 18 years old) and Prafulla Chaki threw bombs at a carriage they believed was carrying the British judge Douglas Kingsford, who had handed down harsh sentences to Swadeshi activists. The attempt missed Kingsford and killed two British women instead. Khudiram was captured, tried and hanged a few months later; he was reportedly calm and smiling in his final moments.

Q7 Who Am I? I was martyred at a young age after throwing non-lethal bombs in Delhi's Central Legislative Assembly.

Bhagat Singh. He and an associate dropped two low-intensity bombs in Delhi's Central Legislative Assembly in 1929, intending only 'to make the deaf hear', not to cause casualties. He was arrested and tried for the earlier assassination of a British officer (intended to avenge Lala Lajpat Rai's death). Despite appeals for clemency, Bhagat Singh, along with Sukhdev Thapar and Shivaram Rajguru, was hanged in 1931 at the ages of 22–23.

Q8 Who Am I? I turned the freedom struggle into a mass movement through the principles of ahimsa and satyagraha, leading campaigns such as the Dandi March.

Mahatma Gandhi (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi). He returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and applied his method of satyagraha (insistence on truth) and ahimsa (nonviolence) to the independence struggle. He led the famous Dandi March of 1930 (Salt March), launched the Non-Cooperation Movement, and the Quit India Movement of 1942, turning the freedom struggle into a mass movement involving millions of ordinary Indians.

Q9 Who Am I? I sought help from the Axis powers during World War II to organise the Indian National Army.

Subhas Chandra Bose. Convinced that freedom could come only through armed struggle, he escaped house arrest in India in early 1941 and travelled to Germany to seek support from the Axis powers. He later moved to Japan and Singapore in 1943, where he formed the Indian National Army (INA) from Indian prisoners of war and volunteers, and declared the Azad Hind ('free India') government.

Q10 Who Am I? A British lawyer, I was given just five weeks to draw the boundary line that would partition the Indian subcontinent into two separate nations.

Cyril Radcliffe. He was a British lawyer who was unfamiliar with India. In July 1947, Viceroy Mountbatten chose Radcliffe and gave him just five weeks to draw the new borders between India and Pakistan. The resulting Radcliffe Line split Punjab and Bengal almost overnight, creating the boundary between Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, and led to the displacement of millions of people.

Exercise 2.3 — Reflective and Discussion Questions

Q1 What kinds of sacrifices are needed to achieve freedom? Think about the lives of Indian soldiers during wars, families suffering during famines, leaders and ordinary people who were arrested, and countless others who lost their homes and safety while participating in protests. If you were living during India's freedom struggle, would you have chosen to participate in it? What comforts, opportunities, or personal goals might you have been willing to give up for a cause you strongly believed in?

Achieving freedom required enormous sacrifices at every level. Soldiers risked and lost their lives; over 40,000 people were jailed during the Non-Cooperation Movement alone, 60,000 during the Salt Satyagraha, and over 1,00,000 during the Quit India Movement. Families endured poverty and hunger during famines caused by colonial exploitation. Leaders like Bhagat Singh and Khudiram Bose gave up their lives as young men. MODEL ANSWER — If living during the struggle, one might choose to participate by joining boycotts of foreign goods and giving up imported cloth or sugar, leaving government schools to join national institutions, or distributing leaflets despite the risk of arrest. One would likely give up comfort, career prospects, and personal safety for the greater cause of freedom and dignity.

Q2 What values does Tilak's statement, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it," reflect? Can these values be meaningful for young people today?

Tilak's statement reflects the values of self-determination, dignity, and fearlessness. It asserts that freedom is not a privilege granted by rulers but a natural right belonging to every person and every nation. It also reflects courage — Tilak spoke these words knowing he could face imprisonment for sedition. For young people today, these values remain meaningful: the belief that one has the right to shape one's own future, to resist injustice, and to pursue one's goals with determination and courage are timeless ideals applicable to personal life, civic participation, and standing up for rights in any era.

Q3 How did peasants, workers, tribals, and students contribute to the national movement in ways different from political leaders?

While political leaders shaped the ideology and strategy of the movement, ordinary people made it a mass struggle through direct, everyday action. Peasants participated in tax-refusal movements such as Bardoli (led by Patel), resisting revenue demands at great personal cost. Tribal communities like the Mundas under Birsa Munda led uprisings to reclaim their land and assert tribal dignity. Workers went on strike during the Quit India Movement, shutting down colonial economic machinery. Students left government schools and colleges to join national institutions, boycotted foreign goods, and sometimes took up arms — as the young students Suniti Chowdhury and Shanti Ghosh of Comilla did. Unlike leaders, they bore repression without the protection of status or public prominence.

Q4 Discuss in class this extract from Nehru's speech on 15 August 1947: "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance…" What is meant by "redeem our pledge"? How would you define the 'soul of a nation'?

"Redeem our pledge" means to fulfil the promise that generations of freedom fighters had made — that India would one day be free and self-governing. The pledge was the collective commitment of all those who struggled, suffered, and died for independence; midnight on 15 August was the moment that promise was finally honoured. Nehru adds 'not wholly or in full measure' because the joy of independence was shadowed by the tragedy of Partition and the violence it brought. The 'soul of a nation' can be understood as the shared identity, culture, hopes, and aspirations of a people — the inner spirit that keeps a nation alive through centuries of oppression. Nehru suggests that this spirit, long suppressed under colonial rule, finally found expression with independence.

Q5 India achieved freedom after great sacrifice. What responsibilities do citizens have today to protect and strengthen this freedom? Write 5 to 10 lines.

Citizens today carry the responsibility of honouring the immense sacrifices made by generations of freedom fighters. First, we must actively participate in democratic processes — voting, staying informed, and holding elected leaders accountable. Second, we must uphold the constitutional values of equality, justice, and fraternity, which were at the heart of the freedom struggle. Third, we should resist injustice, discrimination, and corruption just as our freedom fighters resisted colonial oppression — through lawful and nonviolent means. Fourth, we must preserve national unity by respecting India's diversity of languages, religions, and cultures, since the freedom struggle itself united people of all backgrounds. Finally, we have a duty to keep the memory of the freedom struggle alive — learning from it, teaching future generations, and understanding the true cost of the liberty we enjoy today.

Exercise 2.4 — Creative and Activity-Based Questions

Q1 Imagine you are a freedom fighter. a) Explain the method you support to achieve freedom. b) Discuss with your classmates any other method they would support. Be respectful in your debate. c) What does this debate teach us about unity and disagreement?

GUIDANCE ANSWER — This is a creative role-play activity. (a) Choose one approach from the chapter — for example: Gandhi's nonviolence and satyagraha (mass civil disobedience, boycott of foreign goods, peaceful non-cooperation); or Tilak's Nationalist method (using cultural symbols, mass awakening, passive resistance); or the revolutionary path (direct action to pressurise colonial rulers). Explain the method in your own words with one example from the chapter. (b) Other students may choose different methods; listen respectfully and note where you agree and disagree. (c) The debate should show that the freedom fighters, despite different methods, shared the same goal of independence — disagreement over means did not break their fundamental unity of purpose, and that diversity of approaches can collectively strengthen a movement.

Q2 Write a news report based on an important event in the Freedom Movement (Swadeshi, boycott, satyagraha, Non-Cooperation, Quit India, or Partition). a) Write a headline. b) Include one interview or public reaction. c) Explain why this event was important.

GUIDANCE ANSWER — This is a writing activity. Choose one event, for example the Salt March (Dandi March) of 1930. (a) Headline example: 'Gandhi Leads 380-km March to Dandi to Break Salt Law — Thousands Join'. (b) Interview example: Quote a participant — 'We have walked for weeks through scorching heat, but every step brings us closer to freedom,' says one marcher. (c) Importance: The Salt March challenged a key colonial law in a peaceful, visible way; it drew thousands of ordinary Indians — especially women — into the movement, showed the world the injustice of British rule, and launched the wider Civil Disobedience Movement. Use details from the chapter (380 km, Gujarat coastal village, symbolic salt-making, mass arrests that followed) to make the report authentic.

Q3 Imagine you are part of a team creating a small museum exhibition on India's freedom struggle for students of your age. a) Choose a title for your exhibit. b) Select three objects (for example: a letter, a photograph, a newspaper, a prison diary) and explain what each object represents. c) Write a short note on what visitors should learn or feel after seeing this exhibit.

GUIDANCE ANSWER — This is a creative design activity. (a) Example title: 'From Chains to Freedom: 90 Years of Courage'. (b) Three objects — (i) A copy of the Bande Mataram newspaper: represents the power of the press and Nationalist ideas; shows how writing could challenge colonial rule. (ii) A spinning wheel (charkha): represents Gandhi's Swadeshi philosophy, self-reliance, and the economic resistance to British goods. (iii) A photograph of the Cellular Jail, Andaman Islands: represents the suffering and sacrifice of revolutionaries who endured solitary confinement and forced labour for their country. (c) The note should say: 'After visiting this exhibit, we hope you feel the courage, pain, and hope that millions of Indians carried for 90 years. Their sacrifice — through marches, jail, and even death — gave us the freedom we have today. May we never take it for granted.'

Q4 As a class activity, write and stage a small play or skit based on the Freedom Movement.

GUIDANCE ANSWER — This is a performance activity for the whole class. Choose a key moment from the chapter — such as the Dandi March, the Quit India Movement speech, or the night of Independence. Assign roles (Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, a common villager, a British official) based on the chapter's descriptions. Write short dialogues grounded in actual speeches or events mentioned in the chapter (for example, Gandhi's 'Do or Die' call, or Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny' speech). Include a narrator to provide context. The skit should capture both the struggle and the spirit of the era, and end with a reflection on what independence meant to ordinary people.