

India's Military and its Impact on the Formation of a Nation

By Nikki Sway

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Document 2: Branson Letters

In 1943, the midst of World War Two, the Bengal region of Eastern India was struck by a deadly famine. Out of a population of 60 million, 2-3 million people died of starvation and diseases increased by malnutrition. The 1943 Bengal Famine has been widely debated. Some historians have argued that it was a man-made famine. Rather than being caused by natural conditions (such as drought) it has been asserted that this famine was caused by British wartime policy decisions such as destroying rice rather than letting it fall into Japanese hands. Clive Branson, the author of these letters, was a British Sergeant stationed in Western India at the time of this writing.

August 20, 1943. *Ahmednagar.*

The *Times of India* reports that on August 18th 129 people were picked up in Calcutta off the streets in a state of collapse due to starvation, and the next day the number picked up was 192, making 445 in four days.

People's Food Committees and unofficial Relief Committees are still on the increase...

One important fact to be noted- train-loads of grain are being taken to Bengal, but are obviously not reaching the people who need it.

August 28, 1943. *Ahmednagar.*

In my last letter I gave you some of the details of the famine in Calcutta. The number of starving people picked up in the streets were August 21, 46; August 25, 43. But be clear on the fact that Bengal, *as a whole*, is like this.

Recently, in Delhi, a Government spokesman in a food debate gave a long list of how every effort made to get food to the people of Bengal (import, transport, purchases, anti-hoarding, etc.) had been openly opposed, hindered, ignored by the *local officials*. Now the Mayor of Calcutta is reported to have sent a telegram to Churchill: "We appeal to you in the name of the starving humanity to arrange for the immediate shipments of food-grains from America, Australia, and other countries." But the fact is that there is enough food in India now. Appeals of this kind by the Mayor are only the cover- as is the excuse that the army is eating everything to incise the people against the army- the cloak to hide the hoarders, the big grain merchants, the landlords and the bureaucrats *who have engineered the famine*- as the bridges of the Marne were left for the German army.²⁴

²⁴ Clive Branson, *British Soldier in India, the Letters of Clive Branson* (New York: International Publishers, 1945), 90-92.

Document 3: Bristow Memoir

Written by R.C.B. Bristow, a Brigadier in the Indian Army, this memoir published in 1974 covers his experiences as a soldier in India during World War Two. This passage covers the Japanese invasion of Burma and Malaya (modern day Myanmar and Malaysia) just east of India. The “Quit India” movement, mentioned by Bristow, was a movement started in Bombay during World War Two that demanded an end to British colonial rule of India. The passage mentions the Dogras. They are an ethno-linguistic group that live along the Indian and Pakistani border in Punjab. The British viewed the Dogras as a ‘martial class’ and therefore supposedly superior soldiers to other Indian ethnic and language groups.

Nineteen hundred and forty-two was a critical year in India. Until then the war had been remote, but the entry of Japan and the rapid loss of Malaya and Burma had brought the conflict very close. Taking advantage of our failures the Congress Party under Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Nehru launched their so called non-violent ‘Quit India’ campaign, resulting in riots, murder, and sabotage of communications in strategic areas.

Emotionally the situation placed Indian troops at home under greater strain than those in the field, but they never wavered. The decisive factor was the trust that existed between British officers and Indian soldiers. The latter believed that the safety of India depended on remaining loyal to their officers and their regiment, and that the future of their country should be settled after the defeat of the common enemy. Despite the loss of three Dogra battalions in Malaya and Burma, no martial class remained more loyal than the Dogras, and I heard no word of criticism or defeatism, but only of determination to win the war.²⁵

²⁵ R.C.B. Bristow, *Memories of the British Raj: A Soldier in India* (London: Johnson, 1974), 125.

Document 4: 'Quit India' Resolution

In the midst of World War Two, after a failed British attempt to get all Indians on board with the war effort, the Indian National Congress started an anti-British campaign known as the 'Quit India' movement. Originally written by Mahatma Gandhi and later amended by Muslim leader Jawaharlal, this resolution was passed by the Indian National Congress in 1942. Shortly after, all Congress leaders were imprisoned by British authorities.

The Gandhi Draft Was Presented to the Committee on April 27, 1942

Whereas the British War Cabinet proposals by Sir Stafford Cripps have shown up British imperialism in its nakedness as never before, the All-India Congress Committee has come to the following conclusions:

The committee is of the opinion that Britain is incapable of defending India. It is natural that whatever she does is for her own defense. There is the eternal conflict between Indian and British interest. It follows that their notions of defense would also differ.

The British Government has no trust in India's political parties. The Indian Army has been maintained up till now mainly to hold India in subjugation. It has been completely segregated from the general population, who can in no sense regard it as their own. This policy of mistrust still continues, and is the reason why national defense is not entrusted to India's elected representatives.

Japan's quarrel is not with India. She is warring against the British Empire. India's participation in the war has not been with the consent of the representatives of the Indian people. It was purely a British act. If India were freed, her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan.

The Congress is of the opinion that if the British withdrew from India, India would be able to defend herself in the event of the Japanese, or any aggressor, attacking India.

The committee is, therefore, of the opinion that the British should withdraw from India. The plea that they should remain in India for the protection of the Indian princes is wholly untenable. It is an additional proof of their determination to maintain their hold over India. The princes need have no fear from an unarmed India.²⁶

²⁶ "A History of India," Resources, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, accessed January 10, 2020, <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415485432/31.asp>.

Document 5: Indian Ministry of Information Report

As India gained Independence from the British, the former colonial nation was splitting into what would become modern day India and Pakistan. They were divided along religious lines, with Pakistan a Muslim nation and India a Hindu nation. This change required civilians to move to the side of the forming border representing their religious identity. The following report was created by the Indian Ministry of Information on November 2nd, 1947 and tracks the movement of civilians by religion.

... Three non-Muslim refugee trains with 13,000 persons from Pakistan reached Amritsar on October 31. On the same day four refugee specials carrying 15,500 Muslim refugees passed through Amritsar and two specials with 10,000 Muslims arrived at Ferozepore from Ludhiana enroute to Pakistan.

There were foot movements of Muslim refugees on October 31. 50,000 Muslims left Amritsar from for Wagah. 25,000 Muslims reached Amritsar from Jandiala and 20,000 Muslims arrived at Kartarpur from Beas. 40,000 Muslims moved to Kartarpur from Beas.

In Ferozepore district, 200 Muslim refugees and five abducted girls were recovered from various pockets and sent over to Pakistan on October 28.

Six hundred non-Muslim converts and abducted men, women and children were moved in motor lorries to Lahore. Seventy-two Muslims, including five abducted girls, were cleared from Patti, Adampur, Pamunwala, Durepala and Sanawala and moved to Pakistan...

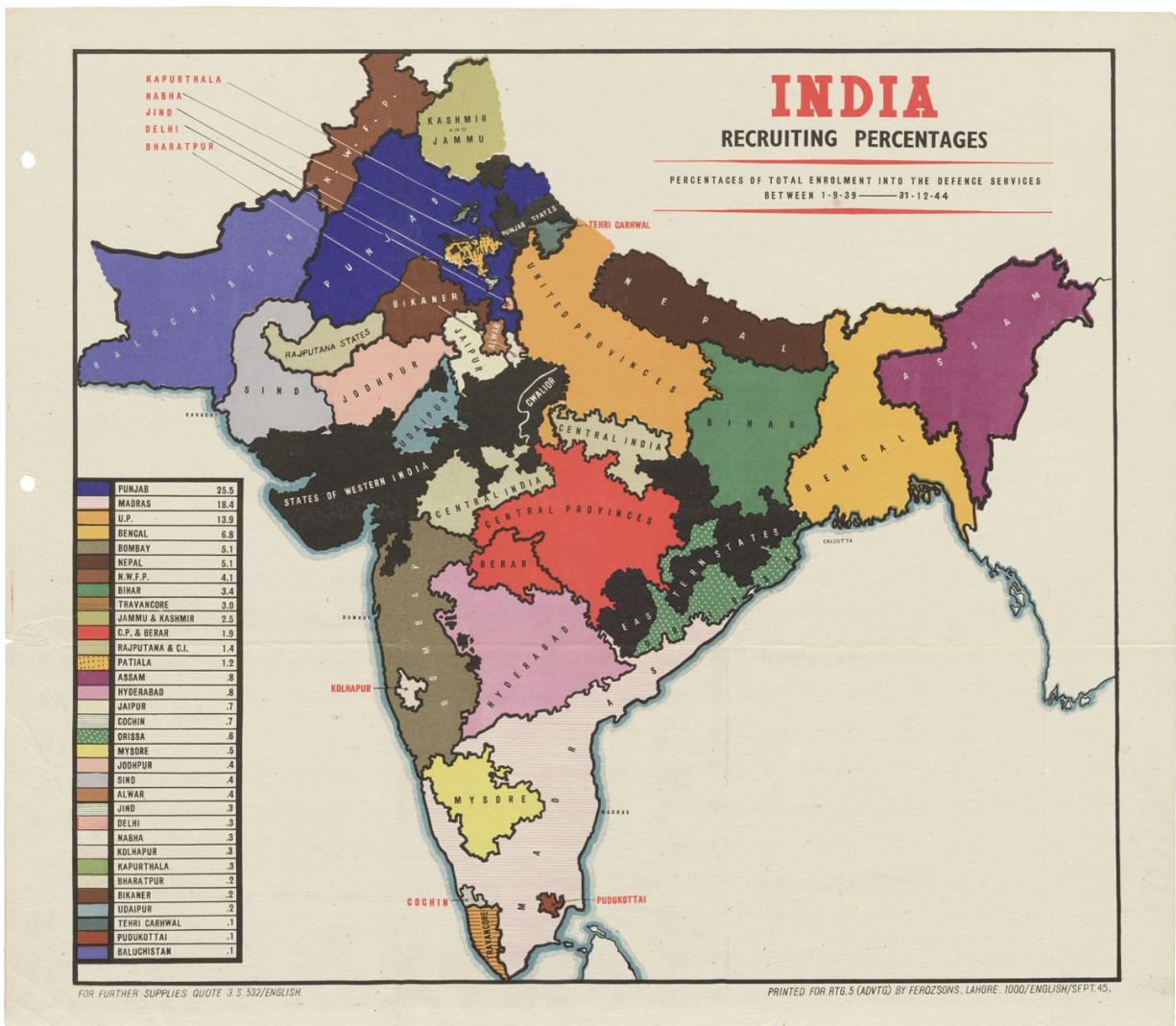
At Ravi Bridge, 4 miles South-east of Narowal 17 non-Muslim women with children were recovered by Pakistan troops and handed over to Indian troops.

Families of Royal Indian Navy and Army personnel were moved to India from Sargodha, Multan, Sianwali and Phillawan in Pakistan.²⁷

²⁷ "Movement of Refugees," The Road to Partition 1939-1947, UK National Archives, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/movement-refugees/>.

Document 6: Indian Army Recruiting Percentages

Throughout World War Two the British increased recruitment to the Indian Army. This increase in recruitment has been claimed to represent less of a reliance on the so-called 'martial races' and an opening up of army recruitments to all regions, religions, and races. This map represents the recruitment of soldiers from Indian Provinces between 1939-1944 and shows the percentage of the Indian Army coming from each respective province.²⁸



²⁸ "Indian Army Recruitment 1939-1944," The Road to Partition 1939-1947, UK National Archives, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/indian-army-recruitment-1939-1944/>.

Document 7: U.S. Reaction to U.K. Withdrawal

These American newspaper articles cover the announcement of Britain's decision to pull out of India in February 1947. This decision was heavily influenced by Indian Independence movements during World War Two by the Indian National Congress and Gandhi. Writing from America, these journalists comment on the worldwide significance of Indian Independence. Attlee was Britain's Prime Minister from 1945-1951. Nehru, a member of the Indian National Congress, would become India's first Prime Minister from 1947-1964.

The NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE said:

“Attlee's announcement that the British were determined to withdraw from India whether or not a new constitution could be agreed upon by the Indians, is a truly momentous event. It marks a breach with the older world that is more striking than anything that has occurred since World War One revolutionised Europe. A new nation, whose potentialities can only be guessed at, is rising in Asia—in a plastic Asia that may yet, in sure hands, be shaped into a mould for the future of the world.

“The British might easily have lingered on in India, playing off Hindu against Moslem, prince against peasant, presiding over a tense and costly stalemate in the interests of imperial prestige. By refusing this role—despite the temptations which it must have offered to a government under great pressure from within and without the country—Attlee and his colleagues have been statesmanlike. And the British people discarding the trappings of imperialism—which would have seemed shabby in the cold, cruel light of this post-war dawn—have taken on a new dignity and a new moral strength, which multiplies the respect they have won by courage in the war and patience under the privations of peace.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES said:

“Every passing day should now crowd the opposing Indian leaders closer to some compromise. It may be that the Moslems themselves can modify (Moslem leader) Jinnah's recalcitrant attitude. There are signs that some of them are trying to do so. A position which is still politically expedient now may become untenable a year from now. Nehru may be shrewd enough to increase his inducements for Moslem collaboration. It is certain India cannot build her independence on a deadlock. Independence with no ability to control it and no power to maintain it promises only catastrophe”²⁹

²⁹ “U.S. Reaction to U.K. Withdrawal,” The Road to Partition 1939-1947, UK National Archives, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/us-reaction-uk-withdrawal/>.

Document 8: Risks of Partition

Written on February 19th, 1947 by British Secretary of State this letter was sent to the British ambassador in Washington D.C. In the letter, he describes the potential for a partition between India and Pakistan and comments on the British political position. Partition would become an increasingly violent and caused the mass migration of millions of people. To this day, some people remain stateless. The British have been blamed for not aiding in the organization of partition and instead withdrawing too quickly.

(7) We, therefore, think that Statement provides the best prospect of being able to hand over functions of existing Central Government to a single Government having support of both major parties. But if, when date for withdrawal is reached, this is not possible we shall hand over to whatever constituted authorities seem most representative of different of the country when the time comes. Paragraph 10 of the Statement is designed to avoid, on the one hand, commitment to create Pakistan (which will encourage League to be obstructive), and on the other, any indication that we should, whatever happens, hand over to one authority only (which would encourage Congress Party to be uncompromising).

(8) We realize, of course, that we are running the risk that no settlement will be arrived at and that no settlement will be arrived at and that as date for our withdrawal draws near communal situation will deteriorate seriously. But this is just as likely to happen if we make no Statement because both sides will hope that we shall assist them against the other. We believe, therefore, that the right course is for us to be definite as to our intentions.

(9) It may be felt that a definite partition of India before our departure would, if there is no agreement, be preferable, in the last resort, to withdrawal in any way we propose. Cogent reasons were given in opening paragraphs of Cabinet's Mission Statement of 16th May against any form of Pakistan because the area claimed by the Muslim League would contain far too great a minority of non-Muslim population while a smaller area having a substantial Muslim majority could not be capable economically of survival as an independent state. Partition would be violently resented by a large part of the Indian population including substantial elements in the area affected. The equitable demarcation of the areas to be separated would be a matter of extreme difficulty but it is not totally excluded by paragraph 10 of the statement if it is found inevitable at a later stage.³⁰

³⁰ "Risks of Partition," The Road to Partition 1939-1947, UK National Archives, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/risks-partition/>.

Document 9: India-Pakistan Relations

Written by India's High Commissioner in London on October 20th, 1947, this report describes the state of Indian and Pakistani relations only a few months after the Indian Independence Act was signed on August 15th. The mass migration of refugees across the border, particularly in the North-Western Punjabi region, is noted as a significant destabilizing factor. Despite the fact that the British no longer controlled the area, there was an interest in maintaining stability in the region for economic and political gains.

13. In fact the General situation will continue, to remain in “negative control” until the psychological position improves and confidence is restored. A number of tendencies are still preventing this. The vast movement of refugees in both directions in the Punjab (conservative estimates put the figure up to date at 4 million) and the lesser movements elsewhere cause a general feeling of instability. The long range exchange of arguments between the Deputy Prime Minister (India) and the Prime Minister, Pakistan, which continued during the week, regarding the migration of populations only aggravate this. In addition, “the constant demands of the leaders of the majority’ communities” as H.S. Suhrawaddy recently said “for reiterated and fulsome expressions of loyalty to the state by the minorities are fast assuming the proportions of sadism”.

These demands are not infrequently but also illogically followed by remarks of the kind recently made by the President of the U.P. Congress Committee that he knew the Muslim leaguers had always tried to “betray the country and therefore they would now be given their proper place. Again the bitter attitude of refugees is a constant hindrance to better relations between the communities. In Delhi for example where, as Gandhi recently said “there was no love lost between the Hindus and Muslims whose hearts were still estranged” the well-to-do Sikh and Hindu refugees from the West Punjab who have had to abandon their business and property are vehement in their criticisms of the weak attitude adopted by the Nehru Government and demand that the wealthy Muslims of Delhi should as a corollary be sent to Pakistan. Added to this are the continued harassments to the minorities in both Dominions by petty officialdom and the undeniable feeling of the general public in many affected areas that they do not want to see minorities back again in their midst. Until all these tendencies can “be counteracted there can “be no real restoration of confidence. And until this does take place there can be no return to normal conditions of life.³¹

³¹ “India-Pakistan Relations,” The Road to Partition 1939-1947, UK National Archives, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/india-pakistan-relations/>

Document 10: Gandhi on Non-Violence

Written on November 8th, 1920 by Mahatma Gandhi, this statement often referred to as “The Doctrine of the Sword,” describes Gandhi’s views on non-violence. Gandhi was born in Western India in 1869 and raised Hindu. He would go on to study law in London, fight for Civil Rights in South Africa, and join the Indian National Congress as a key player in the Indian Independence Movement. While Gandhi is most well known for his dedication to non-violence, this piece offers a more nuanced representation of his beliefs. Having been written in 1920, this piece represents his earlier views.

I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run away and seen me killed or whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence.

But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment....

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non- violence is not meant merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute, and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law — to the strength of the spirit....

I am not pleading for India to practise nonviolence because she is weak. I want her to practise nonviolence being conscious of her strength and power. No training in arms is required for realization of her strength. We seem to need it, because we seem to think that we are but a lump of flesh. I want India to recognize that she has a soul that cannot perish, and that can rise triumphant above every physical weakness and defy the physical combination of a whole world.

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³² M.K. Gandhi, *My Non-Violence*, (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House,) 5-7.
https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/my_nonviolence.pdf.