

THE UNQUIET HEART: EMOTIONS, RESISTANCE, AND THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIA (1918–1928)

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ABSTRACT

This essay investigates the representation of emotions in the political resistance of British India during the crucial decade of 1918-1928. I propose that emotions—specifically fear, hate, and anger—were not mere byproducts of the colonial encounter but were, in fact, the primary catalysts and shaping forces behind the significant political events of this period. The British administration, through its policies of suppression, half-hearted reforms, and outright violence, systemically generated these emotional responses. Indian political actors, in turn, channeled this potent emotional energy into structured resistance, from the mass mobilization of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements to the unified boycotts of the Simon Commission. This study examines how British actions, such as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the all-white Simon Commission, acted as emotional flashpoints that transformed latent public fear into active political anger and a deep-seated hatred for the colonial system. I argue that understanding this emotional economy is essential for comprehending the escalating trajectory of the independence movement, the growing communal rifts, and the ultimate impossibility of continued British rule. This work re-frames the narrative of resistance, moving beyond a purely political or economic analysis to center the visceral, human emotions that fueled the fight for freedom.

KEYWORDS: History of Emotions, Political Resistance, British India, Colonialism, Indian Nationalism

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65463/37>

The decade following the First World War, 1918-1928, represents a critical turning point in the history of British India. It was a period of intense political friction, mass mobilization, and profound ideological shifts. While traditional historiography has thoroughly examined the political negotiations, constitutional reforms, and economic pressures of this era, it has often overlooked the powerful undercurrent driving these events: the raw, visceral emotions of the colonized. I suggest that the political resistance of this decade cannot be fully understood without analyzing it as a direct representation of collective fear, anger, and hatred. These were not spontaneous or irrational outbursts; they were the calculated, if often explosive, responses to a colonial administration that consistently sowed the seeds of its own destruction through policies of suppression, humiliation, and broken promises. The British Raj, in its attempt to secure its dominion after the war, ignited an emotional firestorm that it could no longer control.

I propose that the political history of this period is, in essence, a history of these emotions. Fear, the baseline condition of a populace living under arbitrary and often violent foreign rule, was the foundation (Fischer-Tiné and Whyte 2016, 3). This fear was not merely a passive state but an active, corrosive force, shaping daily life and limiting political expression. The British, however, repeatedly miscalculated, pushing this fear past its breaking point. Through acts of profound cruelty, such as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and acts of deep-seated racial arrogance, like the all-white Simon Commission, the administration transformed this paralyzing fear into a galvanizing anger. This anger, in turn, solidified into a more permanent, systemic hatred—a deep-seated

rejection of the entire colonial apparatus, its institutions, and its claims to moral legitimacy.

This essay will trace the trajectory of these emotions as they manifested in the key political events from 1918 to 1928. I will explore how the hollow promises of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms dashed Indian expectations, breeding anger and resentment. I will analyze how the Rowlatt Act and the subsequent Amritsar massacre became potent symbols that fused fear and anger into a nationwide movement. I will then examine how Mahatma Gandhi and the leaders of the Khilafat Movement masterfully harnessed this collective outrage, channeling it into the structured, non-violent resistance of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Finally, I will argue that the events of the later 1920s—the communal fissures exposed by the Delhi Proposals and the unified, cross-communal hatred directed at the Simon Commission, followed by the divisive Nehru Report—demonstrate the growing complexity of this emotional landscape. The resistance was no longer just against the British; it was becoming a struggle defined by the competing fears and aspirations of India's own communities, a tragic legacy of the "divide and rule" policy that had been, at its core, an exercise in emotional manipulation.

The study of India's struggle for independence is a vast field, dominated by distinct and often conflicting schools of thought. Nationalist historians, for instance, have provided invaluable contributions by centering the narrative on Indian grievances and the moral righteousness of the freedom struggle. Scholars like Sundar Lal (1957) and Sardar Ali Khan (1907) powerfully articulate the sense of betrayal and exploitation that defined the colonial experience. Their works

are crucial for understanding the emotional foundations of resistance, portraying Indians as victims of oppressive British policies that stoked religious and nationalistic fervor. Lal's examination of the 1857 War of Independence, for example, correctly identifies the greased cartridge issue as a profound emotional trigger, a deliberate assault on the religious identities of soldiers that sparked widespread revolt. Similarly, Khan's analysis of the Bengal partition highlights the emotional turmoil and perceived threat to Hindu cultural identity that fueled the Swadeshi movement.

In contrast, many Western historians, while acknowledging Indian grievances, have offered a more nuanced, and at times critical, analysis of colonial processes and resistance activities. The works of Michael Edwardes (1973) and Rupert Furneaux (1963) provide a complex picture of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, illuminating not just the intensity of British persecution but also the wider socio-political tensions and internal disputes that characterized Indian society. These scholars challenge the more simplistic nationalist binaries of 'oppressor' and 'oppressed,' suggesting a more intricate web of collaboration, resistance, and competing interests. While their perspectives are essential for a balanced historical understanding, they, like their nationalist counterparts, tend to analyze events primarily through a political or administrative lens, with the emotional dimension remaining an implicit rather than an explicit focus of study. My own work builds upon both traditions, borrowing the nationalist school's emphasis on the legitimacy of Indian emotional grievances while employing the Western school's critical lens to analyze the complex, and sometimes contradictory, nature of these emotional representations.

The existing literature, despite its strengths, leaves a significant gap in our understanding of the emotional dynamics of political resistance in British India. While historians have shown that hate, anger, and fear were present, there has been insufficient analysis of how these specific emotions were constructed, manipulated, and represented within the historical context, and how they directly shaped political strategy and outcomes. My research seeks to fill this lacuna by employing a methodology of qualitative historical analysis, informed by the theoretical framework of "history of emotions" and civil resistance studies. I use Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash's (2009) *Civil Resistance and Power Politics* as a foundational model. This text provides a robust framework for understanding civil resistance not in isolation, but as a phenomenon deeply intertwined with other factors of power—including the potent, non-material power of collective emotion. Their analysis of Gandhi's campaigns, for example, offers a template for seeing how emotions like solidarity and anger can be strategically mobilized.

My primary method involves a close reading of the primary and secondary sources listed in the thesis bibliography. I analyze primary source documents—such as newspaper reports from *Paisa Akhbar* or *Zamindar*, political speeches, and official reports like the *Report of the Commissioners Appointed by the Punjab Sub-committee* (1920)—not just for their factual content but as representations of emotional states. When Jinnah resigns over the Rowlatt Act, I analyze his letter not just as a political act but as a documented expression of anger and disgust. This qualitative approach allows me to trace the "emotional economy" of the period: how British actions "produced" fear, how political

leaders "refined" that fear into anger, and how that anger was "spent" in acts of political resistance like boycotts and protests. By focusing on the 1918-1928 decade, I am able to conduct a focused case study of a period where these emotional dynamics were at their most visible and consequential, bookended by the dashed hopes of World War I and the definitive communal and political hardening at the decade's end.

THE EMOTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF RESISTANCE (PRE-1918)

To understand the volatile emotional landscape of 1918, I must first establish that the fear, anger, and hatred that exploded in this decade were not new. They were the culmination of a long, simmering history of suppression and resistance, which had already established a clear pattern: British actions provoked Indian emotional responses, which in turn fueled political opposition. The War of Independence of 1857 stands as the foundational event in this emotional history. While often analyzed in political or military terms, I argue it was, at its core, a widespread representation of profound anger and hatred. This emotional eruption was the direct result of the East India Company's systematic assault on the cultural, religious, and economic lives of Indians. The policy of paying Indian soldiers significantly less than their British counterparts, for example, was a constant source of humiliation that bred deep-seated anger and resentment (Rizvi 1959, 107).

The religious arrogance of the Company was an even more potent emotional accelerant. The order for Hindu soldiers to abandon the tilak or the perceived threat of forced conversions in missionary-run orphanages created a pervasive fear for their

very cultural identity. This fear was not abstract; it was a daily, visceral anxiety. As V.D. Savarkar (1909, 47) notes, the promotion of Christianity was seen as an attempt to "wave triumphant from one end to another end of India," an existential threat that united disparate groups in a shared sense of anger. This simmering anger and fear finally coalesced into open hatred with the introduction of the greased cartridges. This single act, forcing Hindu and Muslim soldiers to violate their deepest religious taboos, was the final, unforgivable insult. It confirmed their worst fears and provided a powerful, emotive symbol for a rebellion fueled by decades of accumulated rage (Nizami 1958, 8).

This pattern of British action provoking emotional resistance was repeated, albeit in a different form, during the 1905 Partition of Bengal. This administrative decision was a masterclass in emotional mismanagement, creating a vortex of anger and distrust. For the Hindu community, the partition was not merely a redrawing of boundaries; it was a "bombshell," a deliberate "insult" to their cultural and religious unity, personified as an attack on the Goddess Kali Mata (Banerjee 1925, 189). This sense of profound anger and violation was immediately channeled into the political resistance of the Swadeshi Movement. The boycott of foreign goods was not just an economic tactic; it was a tangible, physical representation of their hatred for the British policy and a ritual of purification. Students refusing to write exams on foreign paper demonstrated how deeply this emotional resistance had penetrated the social fabric.

Conversely, the partition created a sense of joy and opportunity for the Muslim community, who suddenly found themselves

a majority in the new eastern province (Hameed 1971, 56). However, the British annulment of the partition in 1911, a capitulation to Hindu agitation, reversed this emotional polarity with devastating consequences. The Muslim sense of joy was instantly replaced by a bitter anger and a feeling of profound betrayal. This, I propose, was a pivotal moment. The British, in placating one group's anger, had ignited another's. Muslim leaders like Nawab Salimullah Khan, who had praised the partition, now led the condemnation, and the Muslim press was filled with articles of "anger and grief" (Rehman 1970, 237). This episode, I argue, entrenched a deep-seated fear in the Muslim political consciousness: a fear that their interests would always be sacrificed by the British to appease the Hindu majority. This legacy of "permanent hatred" (Chaudhuri 1951, 237) and mutual fear, engineered by the British, would cast a long and tragic shadow over the events of the coming decades.

A DECADE OF RAGE (1918–1922)

The year 1918 opened with Indian emotions precariously balanced. Indians had contributed massively to the British war effort, and in return, they harbored a fragile hope for substantial political rewards, fueled by the global rhetoric of Wilsonian self-determination. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 shattered this hope and replaced it with a bitter, cynical anger. The reforms, which introduced a convoluted system of "diarchy," were seen as a profound insult. Instead of the expected grant of self-government, Indians were offered a trivial share in provincial power, retaining British control over all-important subjects like finance and law (Robb 1971). This, I argue, was perceived as a betrayal. The British, after

taking Indian blood and money, were now treating them as children, "not ready" for the responsibility of self-rule. This condescension stoked the embers of resentment, creating a pervasive anger that delegitimized the reforms before they were even implemented.

It was in this toxic atmosphere of anger and distrust that the British government introduced the Rowlatt Act in 1919, a decision of such profound political stupidity that it can only be understood as an act of imperial panic. The Act, which allowed for imprisonment without trial, was a direct assault on the most basic principles of justice. I propose it was designed to create fear, to preemptively crush the very dissent the reforms had stoked. But it miscalculated. Instead of cowering the populace, it ignited their anger. The Act was universally perceived as a "black act," a sign that British rule was fundamentally tyrannical (Furneau 1963, 36). The wave of protests, or *hartals*, that swept India was a direct representation of this collective anger.

This fury was articulated most powerfully by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who, in resigning from the Imperial Legislative Council, wrote a letter that I contend is a perfect artifact of this emotional transition. His letter was not just a political disagreement; it was a condemnation. He stated that a government that passes such a law "in the teeth of such opposition" cannot claim to be "actuated by any principles of justice" (Raffique 1973, 84-85). This was the language of anger and disillusionment, a public declaration that the "confidence of the people" was broken. His resignation symbolized the death of the old-guard constitutional approach and the birth of a new, more confrontational politics fueled by raw emotion. The British had intended to instill fear, but they had instead reaped a

harvest of pure anger, setting the stage for the tragedy that was to follow.

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre on April 13, 1919, was the moment that this simmering anger, fear, and hatred exploded into an open, unhealable wound. In a walled garden in Amritsar, General Dyer, acting on the orders of a governor, Michael O'Dwyer, who despised educated Indians, ordered his troops to fire on an unarmed, peaceful gathering (Batalvi 1969, 85). For ten minutes, the soldiers fired, killing 379 and wounding over 1200. This was not a riot control action; it was, I submit, a conscious act of terror. Its goal was to annihilate the budding political resistance by transforming its anger back into paralyzing fear. Dyer himself later admitted his goal was to create a "moral effect" across the Punjab.

He succeeded, but not in the way he intended. The primary "moral effect" of the massacre was not the creation of fear, but the crystallization of a bottomless, irreconcilable hatred. The sheer sadism of the act, followed by the humiliation of martial law—such as the infamous "crawling order" where Indians were forced to crawl on their bellies down the street where a missionary had been attacked—was a systematic campaign of racial degradation (Furieux 1963, 102). This was a deliberate suppression of Indian humanity, and it provoked a hatred that transcended all political calculations. The *Report of the Commissioners Appointed by the Punjab Subcommittee of the Indian National Congress* (1920) is a chilling record of this, a legalistic catalog of atrocities that barely conceals the profound trauma and anger beneath the surface. Jallianwala Bagh became a potent national symbol, a sacred site of martyrdom. It was the ultimate proof that British rule was

not a "civilizing mission" but a "satanic" system, a word Gandhi would soon adopt.

This newfound hatred and anger provided the emotional fuel for the first great mass movements of the 20th century: the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements. The Khilafat issue was, at its heart, a deeply emotional one for Indian Muslims. The Caliph of the Ottoman Empire was not just a foreign ruler; he was the *Amir-ul-Momineen*, the spiritual head of the global Muslim community, a symbol of Islamic unity and strength (Nadvi 1340 AH, 8). Indian Muslims had a long history of deep emotional attachment to the Caliphate, seeing him as their protector (Özcan 1997, 98). The British victory in World War I and the subsequent dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire was thus perceived as a direct, existential attack on their religious identity. Their fear and anger were palpable, and they were prepared to resist.

Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated his political genius by understanding the profound power of this religious anger. He saw in the Khilafat cause a "golden opportunity" to unite Hindus and Muslims, channeling their two distinct streams of anger—Muslim anger over the Caliphate, and Hindu (and all-Indian) anger over Jallianwala and the Rowlatt Act—into a single, massive torrent of non-violent resistance (Riaz 1970, 91). The Non-Cooperation Movement was the political representation of this merged emotional current. Boycotting British goods, courts, and schools was not just a political strategy; it was a collective act of "hate," a ritualized purification from a "satanic" system. Handing back titles and medals was a public act of severing the emotional, as well as political, ties that bound Indians to the Raj.

The movement, however, also revealed the dangers of this emotionally charged politics. The Moplah Rebellion of 1921 was a tragic example of this. The Moplahs, a community of Muslims in Malabar, were animated by the same religious anger as their Khilafat brethren. But, living under a system of oppressive Hindu landlords, their "anger" was not just directed at the distant British but also at their immediate oppressors. The resulting violence, which took on a horrifying communal character, demonstrated how easily the "hate" for the British could be tragically redirected (Qureshi 1981, 1-10). This event, along with the migration (*hijrat*) movement where thousands of Muslims sold their property in an emotional fervor to leave India (Bacha 1979, 236), showed the immense, unpredictable power of the emotions the leaders had unleashed.

The movement's abrupt end came in February 1922 with the Chauri Chaura incident, where a non-violent (in name) procession, provoked by police, turned into an angry mob that burned a police station, killing 21 constables. For Gandhi, this was a "divine warning." It was a moment of horrifying clarity, revealing that the "anger" and "hate" he had so effectively channeled were still too raw, too volatile, and had not been sufficiently disciplined by the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence). His decision to call off the entire Non-Cooperation Movement, while politically devastating to his allies, was an admission of this. Gandhi recognized that the emotional forces he had awakened were a double-edged sword: powerful enough to challenge an empire, but also capable of consuming India itself in a fire of its own hatred.

The legacy of the Khilafat movement, I propose, is profoundly ambiguous. On one

hand, as K.K. Aziz (1972) notes, it was a failure that left Indian Muslims disillusioned and politically adrift, their central emotional grievance (the Caliphate) having been abolished by Mustafa Kemal in Turkey. Yet, on the other hand, it was a crucial, transformative success. It was the first movement to bring Muslim masses—and, critically, Muslim women—out of the "drawing room" and into street politics. It gave them a new political consciousness and a cadre of leaders willing to face prison for their beliefs. More broadly, as B.R. Ambedkar (1945, 142) pointedly observed, it was the Khilafat movement, with its massive Muslim mobilization, that truly made Gandhi's Congress a nationwide power. The era had proven that emotion, when harnessed, was the most powerful political weapon in India.

THE POLITICS OF EMOTIONAL DIVISION (1922-1928)

The collapse of the unified Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements did not dissipate the emotions of fear, hate, and anger; it merely redirected them. The period from 1922 to 1928 is defined by the tragic splintering of the unified "hate" for the British into competing "fears" between India's communities. The Delhi Muslim Proposals of 1927 were a clear-eyed, rational attempt by Muhammad Ali Jinnah to stem this tide. He proposed a formula: Muslims would agree to joint electorates, the core demand of the Congress, in exchange for a set of constitutional guarantees, including the separation of Sindh from Bombay and one-third representation at the center. This was a grand political bargain, an attempt to build a bridge of trust over the growing chasm of communal fear (Shahid 2007, 156-168).

This rational endeavor, however, was doomed to fail because it could not overcome the powerful emotional currents of "fear" and "distrust" that now dominated politics. While initially welcomed by some in Congress, the proposals were swiftly torn apart by the Hindu Mahasabha, which stoked Hindu "fears" of "Muslim domination." The Hindu press, in turn, ridiculed the proposals, portraying Muslims as demanding an unfair price for "giving up" a separate electorate that Hindus felt was illegitimate in the first place (Hasan 1979, 268). I propose that this failure was a critical turning point. It proved to leaders like Jinnah that even the most "reasonable" political compromises were impossible in an atmosphere so poisoned by mutual fear and "hate," emotions that had been tragically inflamed by the communal riots of the mid-1920s.

Into this fractured and suspicious atmosphere, the British government, with an arrogance that I find breathtaking, launched the Simon Commission in 1927. The commission's stated purpose was to review India's constitutional progress. Its composition, however—seven white Englishmen with not a single Indian member—was a profound, racial insult. I argue that this was a "spiritual oppression," as Jinnah so brilliantly termed it, a declaration that no Indian, not Jinnah, not Gandhi, not anyone, was fit to even participate in a discussion about their own future (Saeed 1976, 56). This single act of racial arrogance achieved what Jinnah's proposals and Gandhi's appeals no longer could: it momentarily reunited India in a shared, incandescent "hatred."

The reaction was immediate and universal. The cry of "Go Back, Simon" became the mantra of a nationwide

resistance, a representation of pure, unadulterated "anger." This "hatred" was powerful enough to bridge, for a moment, the gap between the Jinnah and Shafi leagues of the Muslim League and unite them with Congress in a total boycott (Bakhshi 1977, 45). The intensity of this "anger" was evident on the streets. When the commission visited Lahore, a massive, peaceful protest was led by Lala Lajpat Rai. The police, under the command of a British officer, responded with a brutal *lathi* charge. Rai was singled out and beaten; he died days later. His death transformed him into a martyr, and the "hatred" for the commission and the government it represented became deadly serious. The British had once again responded to political "anger" with brute force, and in doing so, had only amplified the "hate" against them.

The ultimate, and perhaps most tragic, event of this decade was the Nehru Report of 1928. It was born from the Simon Commission's insult, a direct response to the British challenge that Indians were incapable of producing their own constitution. An All-Parties Conference, led by Motilal Nehru, was convened to draft a blueprint for a free India. This was India's chance to represent a unified political will. Instead, the final report became a representation of the majority's "fear" of the minority, and the minority's "fear" of the majority. The report, written from a perspective I identify as deeply influenced by the Hindu Mahasabha, rejected nearly all the "fears" and "demands" of the Muslims. It recommended joint electorates (which Muslims had offered) but *without* the separation of Sindh or the one-third representation at the center that was the *quid pro quo* (Burke 2008, 208).

The Muslim reaction was one of uniform "anger" and profound "betrayal." To Muslim leaders, this report, written by their supposed political allies in Congress, was even more "hateful" than the Simon Commission. The British were open enemies; this was a stab in the back from a friend. Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar, who had been a president of Congress, condemned the report as an attempt to make Muslims "permanent slaves" (Jafari 1971, 13-14). The Aga Khan and other leaders declared it a "Hindu Raj" document. For Jinnah, this was the final, devastating blow. His attempt at a compromise at the Calcutta conference, his "Fourteen Points," were summarily rejected. I suggest this was the "parting of the ways" (Aziz 1967, 42). The "fears" that the Delhi Proposals had tried to assuage were now confirmed by the Nehru Report. The "anger" and "hate" were no longer just directed at the British; they were now aimed squarely at the Congress, which was seen as a vehicle for Hindu majoritarianism. The emotional unity of "hate" that brought India together against Simon had been shattered, replaced by an emotional division of "fear" that would, in time, tear India apart.

CONCLUSION

The political landscape of British India from 1918 to 1928 cannot be navigated without a map of its emotions. The "fear" of a people under colonial subjugation, the "anger" sparked by specific acts of British violence and arrogance, and the "hatred" that congealed against the entire "satanic" system were not peripheral; they were the engine of political resistance. I have shown how the British, through policies ranging from the "insult" of diarchy to the "terror" of Jallianwala Bagh and the "arrogance" of the Simon Commission, consistently and fatally

mismanaged this emotional economy. They believed they could use "fear" as a tool of control, only to find they had created a far more potent "anger" and "hatred" that united millions against them. The great movements of this era, I propose, were exercises in channeling this emotional energy into political action.

In this decade, we see the blueprint for the future. The emotional power unleashed by Gandhi proved strong enough to shake the foundations of the world's largest empire. However, this same emotional power, when fractured, proved just as capable of sowing division. The "anger" and "hatred" against the British were clear and unifying. But the "fear" that communities—particularly the Muslim minority—felt for their future in a majority-ruled India proved to be a corrosive, tragic force. The failure of the Nehru Report to allay these "fears" effectively ended the era of unified emotional resistance. The "hate" and "anger" that had once been focused solely on the British were now complicated by a "fear" between communities. This, I conclude, was the most profound and lasting legacy of the decade: the creation of an emotional landscape so scarred by "fear," "anger," and "hatred" that the political journey to independence would be inextricably bound to the tragedy of partition.

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