PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

It may appear somewhat strange that having devoted myself for more than forty years exclusively to the study of ancient Indian history, I should have undertaken, at the fag-end of my life, to write the history of the freedom movement in India. It is, therefore, necessary to say a few words about the genesis of this book. I gave a brief account of it in the Preface to my book, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, published in April, 1957. Since then the Government of India have published the first volume of the *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, written by Dr. Tara Chand, which gives an altogether different version. In his Preface Dr. Tara Chand says that the idea of writing a history of the freedom movement ‘emanated from the late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad,’ Minister of Education, Government of India, and when ‘he asked me to take up the work I gladly accepted the offer’ (pp. xii. xiii). In the Foreword to this book Janab Humayun Kabir, Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, has given a short account of the early history of the project. He contradicts Dr. Tara Chand when he says that ‘at the very first meeting of the Indian Historical Records Commission held after India became free, a resolution was passed for preparing an authentic and comprehensive history of the different phases of the Indian struggle for independence. This recommendation found an immediate response from the late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who directed that steps should forthwith be taken to give effect to it’ (p. vii). He then briefly describes the various steps taken by the Government over a period of four years before a Board of Editors was finally entrusted with the task in 1953. But even Janab Kabir’s account, though a great improvement upon the cryptic statement of Dr. Tara Chand, is very sketchy, inaccurate and misleading.

I have therefore thought it necessary to bring together in an Appendix to this Volume all the relevant facts on this subject, so far as they are known to me. The Appendix will give a clear idea of the part I took in compiling a history of the freedom movement in India, and how all my labours were lost by the
unceremonious rejection of my draft, not by the Board, an autonomous body, for which and under which alone I worked, but by the Government of India which dissolved the Board with effect from 1 January, 1956, and took upon itself the task of writing the history.*

Along with others interested in the subject, I expected that the Government would soon make some arrangement to complete the work left unfinished by the Board. But we had to wait long before it was announced that Dr. Tara Chand had been commissioned to write the history of the freedom movement in India. I have referred in the Appendix to Dr. Tara Chand’s elaborate note on the subject, and I was under no illusion as to the nature of the history that would be written by him. As everyone has now a full opportunity of judging for himself the quality of Dr. Tara Chand’s work from the first volume already published by him, I need not make any comment on it. But being convinced that his plan of the history was radically different from mine, I immediately decided to write a history in my own way, so far as I could do it within the limited resources at my command. Fortunately, the materials compiled by the Board, to which I no longer had any access, have been mostly published by the different State Governments which originally supplied them, and some of those who worked for the Board have published the labours of their study and research in the form of books and articles. I have fully utilized these with full acknowledgment in all cases. Nevertheless, I had practically to write the whole history anew and to work single-handed. I could not hope to produce a voluminous and comprehensive work such as I could have done with the help of the materials collected by the Board and the financial resources at its command. But as an offset to this I had one great advantage. I have written with complete freedom, untramelled by the vacillations and varying moods of the Board to which reference has been made in the Appendix.

I have approached the subject from a strictly historical point of view. It is an ominous sign of the time that Indian history is being viewed in official circles in the perspective of recent politics.

* That history has not yet (1970) been completed though an enormous amount is being spent year after year (R. C. M.)
The official history of the freedom movement starts with the premises that India lost independence only in the eighteenth century and had thus an experience of subjection to a foreign power for only two centuries. Real history, on the other hand, teaches us that the major part of India lost independence about five centuries before, and merely changed masters in the eighteenth century. How this fact has materially affected the course of the freedom movement in India has been shown in Book I, Chapter III.

I propose to deal in this book only with the movement for freedom from the British yoke, as the struggle for independence during Muslim rule by the Rajputs, Marathas and Sikhs, among others, is now treated as a part of the general history of India. I am not therefore confronted with the problem which perplexed the official historian Dr. Tara Chand, namely, “where should the history begin?” I have followed the obvious course of beginning with the hostile reactions against the British conquest; only, by way of introduction, I have added a very brief summary of the events leading to the establishment of British rule and the condition of the people prevailing at the time, such as would be necessary for a proper understanding of the freedom movement.

Nor have I been troubled with the other problem posed by Dr. Tara Chand, namely the difference or distinction between ‘the history of the freedom movement’ and ‘the story of the achievement of independence’. I have merely indicated the process by which India threw off the yoke of the British, and traced the various stages through which it passed. In doing this I had necessarily to deal with the manifold developments in Indian life which accompanied the process or helped and accelerated it. But I have always kept before me the achievement of political independence as the central theme and everything else as mere ancillary to it.

This book is not a history of the British rule in India, but only of the movement to put an end to it. As I have viewed it, the struggle for independence had four distinct phases. The first was an impotent rage, on the part of certain classes and communities, against the imposition of British authority, which gained momentum with the actual experience of the sundry evils of British rule and the miseries caused thereby. It led to sporadic attempts to throw off the British yoke and armed resistance on a
small scale in various localities all over India. These isolated acts formed a background to, and culminated in, the great outbreak of 1857 which, together with the organized armed rebellion of the Wahabis to restore Muslim supremacy (1850 to 1863), may be said to have ended the first phase of the struggle. The drastic manner in which both the revolts were put down caused such a terror and demoralization that armed revolt against the British authority ceased to be regarded as practical politics. The delineation of this phase, which covers exactly a century (1763-1863), is the main theme of Book I of this Volume.

The second phase began almost as soon as the first ended, though grounds were prepared for it half a century before. It was marked by the growth of patriotic and national sentiments, chiefly due to English education and the contact with Western culture brought about by it. There was almost a revolutionary change in every sphere of Indian life, ushering in what is usually designated the Renaissance, and the intellectuals, or more properly the English-educated classes, now dominated the field. Hindu society, religion, literature, etc., underwent such a transformation in course of one century as was not probably witnessed during the preceding thousand years. So far as politics was concerned, it was changed almost beyond recognition. Western ideas of patriotism and nationalism, hitherto unknown in this country, gradually made their influence felt, and the ideal of the British democratic system of government animated the people. Anger and hostility towards the British rule were replaced by devotion and loyalty to the British throne, based upon implicit faith in the benevolence and liberalism of the British people. Armed resistance was replaced by political organization and constitutional agitation. The vision of a united India as a self-governing dominion within British Empire dominated the newly awakened political consciousness of the people. This phase in politics also witnessed the emergence of Indian nation out of a congeries of races, communities and heterogeneous peoples who occupied the geographical region known as India. This second phase, which roughly covers the period 1860-1905 though its seeds were sown before, is dealt with in Book II, or the concluding part of this Volume.

The next Volume, comprising Book III, deals with the
transformation of Indian political ideas of the second phase by the impact of nationalist ideas. The old spirit of faith and devotion to the British was rudely shaken, and constitutional agitation was denounced as mendicancy which produced no result. The political goal was now clearly defined as Swaraj or Home Rule, and instead of fruitless appeals to the British, the people decided to rely on their own efforts. This phase may be said to have begun with the Swadeshi movement in Bengal in 1905 and ended with the death of Bal Gangadharp Tilak and the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the leader of the unarmed national revolt (1920).

The third and concluding Volume deals with the national struggle from 1920 to 15 August, 1947, when India achieved independence. This phase is almost wholly dominated by the personality of Mahatma Gandhi, except during the last five years when he lost the leadership, though not his great popularity, prestige and power. From this point of view the fourth or last phase may be fittingly designated the 'Age of Gandhi'. Its principal characteristic is the new technique of struggle adopted by him which, though not altogether unknown before in India, was never employed on such a wide scale as a practical measure to force concessions from unwilling hands.

Having given some idea of the general nature of the History of the Freedom Movement in India, of which this forms the first Volume, I shall now offer an explanation of some special features in it in order to disarm hostile criticism.

There are some obvious difficulties in writing a history of the movement for freedom in India only fifteen years after it was achieved, and by one who has himself passed through the most eventful period in it, covering the third and fourth phases mentioned above. We are all too near the events to view them in their true perspective. I have been a witness to the grim struggle from 1905 to 1947, and do not pretend to be merely a dispassionate or disinterested spectator; I would have been more or less than a human being if I were so. My views and judgments of men and things may, therefore, have been influenced by passions and prejudices. Without denying this possibility, I may claim that I have tried my best to take a detached view. On the other hand, I possess certain advantages also in having a first-hand knowledge
of the important events and the fleeting impressions and sentiments they left behind on the minds of the people. It is difficult to form a proper idea of these by one who, living at a later period, has only to rely on the record of the past in order to reconstruct its history. Although these reflections do not directly concern the present Volume, indirect influence cannot altogether be ruled out. I have therefore tried to place before the reader all the relevant facts, leaving them to form their own conclusions. As the feelings and impressions of a class or community, whether justified by facts and events and reasonable or not, are of great significance in history, I have, wherever available, quoted at some length views of representative persons whose names carry some weight. As illustrations I may refer to the lengthy extracts from the writings of Raja Rammohan Roy and other Hindu leaders (pp. 33 ff., 54 ff.), Syed Ahmad and other Muslim leaders (pp. 479 ff.), and W. S. Blunt (pp. 468 ff.)* in order to give a first-hand account of the feelings entertained by the Hindus and Muslims towards each other. It is a very important topic in the history of India's struggle for freedom. For Muslim intransigence in placing communalism above nationalism—as the Hindus chose to call it—in twentieth century Indian politics, which ultimately led to Pakistan, can only be properly understood, rationally explained, and even sympathetically viewed by a Hindu, only if he cares to study seriously and objectively the relations between the two communities, as they developed in the nineteenth century. But so much passions and prejudices have gathered round the question that merely a general picture, though accurate and authentic, is not likely to carry conviction, and the best way to deal with it seemed to be to quote the views and statements of eminent contemporary persons who had ample opportunities of knowing the truth. The extent of general ignorance on the subject may be gathered from the fact that today the Indians regard M. A. Jinnah as the father of the two-nation theory, oblivious of the fact that it was propounded, and repeated times without number, by Syed Ahmad and* his followers more than half a century before. The lengthy extracts from Blunt's diary give an idea of the Muslim feelings towards the

Hindus before Aligarh Movement, such as it would be difficult to get from any other source within easy reach. The Hindu-Muslim relation in the present century is the topic of the day which no Indian ever regards without interest and few without prejudice. I have, therefore, tried, even at the risk of repetition and digression, to draw a realistic picture of it in the nineteenth century in order that the momentous events of the twentieth may be looked upon in true perspective.

The outbreak of 1857 has also been dealt with at some length. For, apart from its intrinsic importance, it has been claimed to be the first national war of independence, and the discussion of this topic is, therefore, of special importance in the History of the freedom movement. In 1957 I wrote a separate book on this subject—The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857—and intended it to form a part of the History of the Freedom Movement which I then contemplated to write. But as this book was sold out within six months of its publication, and a number of new books on the subject have since appeared, I thought it best to give a somewhat detailed account of the topic in this Volume. Of course, for a more comprehensive and critical account I would invite a reference to my book, a revised and enlarged edition of which is in contemplation.∗ Even in the comparatively brief account contained in this Volume I have given elaborate details of the outbreaks of the civil population. For, in any discussion of the question whether the revolt of 1857 was the first national war of independence or not, the real character of the outbreaks of the civil population must be the decisive factor. A detailed statement of actual facts, based on authentic sources, is calculated to give a more accurate and definite idea on the subject than any amount of abstract theory or argument. The officially sponsored Centenary Volume of the Mutiny does not contain sufficient details of this nature, and hence I thought it necessary to add them to counteract the current view that the outbreak of 1857 was the first national war of independence. I have tried to show, with the help of the details given, that it was neither 'first', nor 'national,' nor 'a war of independence.'

As the part played by the outbreak of 1857 has been unduly

* This has been published in 1963 (R. C. M.).
exaggerated, the role of the Wahabi movement in the struggle for freedom has been unduly minimised. I have tried to explain its real significance in the light of the researches carried on by Dr. P. N. Chopra, to whom I take this opportunity to express my obligations.

In Book II, which deals with the factors that brought the Indian nation into being, Bengal looms large, and as I have narrated in the Appendix, this formed the chief indictment against the draft I prepared for the Board of Editors. I have no doubt that criticism on the same line will be directed against this book. I do not like to add anything to what I have said on pp. 30-31,* and draw the special attention of my readers to the observations of Jadunath Sarkar quoted on p. 31. After all, history is no respecter of the feelings of persons and communities, and one cannot alter the facts of history. The ideas of nationalism, patriotism, and political organization on Western lines were first developed in Bengal, and then spread to the rest of India. This is a simple historical truth which older generations of political leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, D. E. Wacha,, B. G. Tilak and G. K. Gokhale have all emphasized. The mere fact that the author of this book happens to be a Bengali should not stand in the way of expressing this truth out of a false sense of modesty. It is a truism that parochialism should not influence an author's judgment. What it really means is that parochial feeling must not lead him either to exaggerate or to minimize the value or importance of the part played by the narrow geographical region to which he might belong. Both are equally wrong. His views and statements should be judged by the normal canons of criticism and must not be discredited off-hand on the gratuitous assumption of partiality for his own people or province. I leave it to the readers to judge for themselves whether the role attributed to Bengal is right or not. I may be wrong, due to ignorance, particularly of the language and literature of other parts of India, or error in judgment, and I shall be the first to admit it if I am convinced by facts and arguments; but I shall fail in my duty as a historian if I desist from stating what I believe to be true, simply out of the fear that it will be set down to parochialism. If I have laid

an undue stress or emphasis on any point or aspect, I shall wel-
come a challenge which, if supported by facts and arguments, is
bound to advance or correct our knowledge of history, and there-
by do a great deal of good.

Similarly, I have not hesitated to speak out the truth, even
if it is in conflict with views cherished and propagated by distinc-
guished political leaders for whom I have the greatest respect.
The history of the Hindu-Muslim relations may serve as an illus-
tration. Political exigencies gave rise to the slogan of Hindu-
Muslim fraternity. An impression was sought to be deliberately
created that the Hindus and Muslims had already shed so much
of their individual characteristics, and there was such a complete
transformation of both and a fusion of their cultures that there
was no essential difference between the two. Though every true
Indian must ever devoutly wish for such a consummation, it was,
unfortunately, never a historical fact. Sir Syed Ahmad, M. A.
Jinnah and other Muslim leaders who never believed in it ent-
tained more realistic views in this respect than either Mahatma
Gandhi or Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. To accept as a fact what is
eminently desirable but has not yet been achieved, though perhaps
attainable by prolonged efforts, is not only a great historical error,
but also a political blunder of the first magnitude, which often
leads to tragic consequences. So it has been in the present case.
The Hindu leaders deliberately ignored patent truth and facts of
history when they refused to recognize the fundamental differences
between the Hindus and Muslims which made them two distinct
religious, social and political units. The consequence was that
no serious effort was ever made by the Hindu leaders to tackle the
real problem that faced India, namely how to make it possible
for two such distinct units to live together as members of one
State. Whether the solution of such a problem was within range
of practical politics, no one can say today with any degree of
certainty. But with the examples of Canada or Switzerland
before us, the attempt was worth making. But such an attempt
was never made in India, as the existence of two such fundamen-
tally different political units was never fully realized by the Hindu
leaders. Even today the Indian leaders would not face the
historical truth, failure to recognize which has cost them dear.
They still live in the realm of a fancied fraternity and are as
sensitive to any expression that jars against the slogan of Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai, as they were at the beginning of this century. Verily the Bourbons are not the only people who ever forgot the past and never learnt any lesson even from their own history. I yield to none in a genuine desire to promote communal harmony and amity. If I have violated the political convention of the day by revealing the very unpleasant but historical truth about the relations between the Hindus and Muslims, I have done so in order to elucidate and explain the course of events in the past, not unmingled with the hope that our leaders would draw some useful lessons for the future. In any case, I may assure my readers that I have done so with good will to both the communities and malice to none, being convinced that the solid structure of mutual amity and understanding cannot be built on the quicksands of false history and political expediency. Real understanding can only be arrived at by a frank recognition of the facts of history and not by suppressing and distorting them. These considerations have prompted me to discuss Hindu-Muslim relations in a correct historical perspective. Be it also remembered that such a discussion is indispensable in order to offer a rational explanation of the birth of Pakistan.

As already mentioned above, this book is not meant to be a history of the British rule in India; but a correct knowledge of it is essential for a proper comprehension of the movement to destroy it. I have dealt with the general history of British rule in Volumes IX, X and XI of the History and Culture of the Indian People to be published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay.* As a matter of fact these three Volumes may be regarded as complementary to my three Volumes of the History of the Freedom Movement in India.

As this book is meant for general readers I have not used any diacritical marks. It has also been a very difficult task to devise any uniform method of writing Indian names. The name of Surendra Nath Banerji, for example, is written in no less than six different ways, and though for the sake of uniformity I chose the above form, he himself used a different one. The Bengali epithets like Ghosh, Bose, Mukherji and Banerji are written in

These Three volumes have been published since (R. C. M.).
different ways. I have deliberately avoided the forms Rammohun and Aurobindo, though sanctified by usages, because they seem to be too much anglicised, and adopted the more normal forms Rammohan and Arabinda.

A complete bibliography will be given at the end of the third Volume which will probably be out before the end of 1963.** I take this opportunity to convey my thanks to the Natun Press for having printed this Volume in less than six months’ time. Thanks are also due to my daughter Srimati Sumitra Chaudhuri B.A., for having prepared the Index. I crave the indulgence of the readers for some printing mistakes that have crept in, but as these may be easily detected, I have not added any correction slip.

4, Bepin Pal Road,
Calcutta-26.
September, 1962.

R. C. Majumdar.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

No substantial change has been made in this edition, though is has been necessary to make some additions and alterations in the light of the discovery of new facts and enunciation of new views in some recent publications, notably a number of monographs dealing with special aspects of the Renaissance and development of nationalism in the 19th century.

An important but formal change will be noticed in the transfer of the footnotes to the end of each chapter instead of placing them together at the end of the volume which caused much inconvenience to the readers. I am thankful to the different Journals and newspapers, both in India and outside, for their appreciative review of the First Edition of this book. Thanks are also due to my daughter Sumitra Chaudhuri, B.A. for having prepared the Index of this volume and to Shri D. P. Das for having drawn my attention to some printing mistakes in the First Edition.

4 Bepin Pal Road,
December, 1970
Calcutta-26

R. C. Majumdar

** It has already been published (R. C. M.).