

# Indian Independence Summary

## Movement Toward Independence

The British had ruled India for almost two centuries. Indian resistance to Britain, intensified in 1939, when Britain committed India's armed forces to World War II without first consulting the colony's elected representatives. The move left Indian nationalists stunned and humiliated. Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi launched a nonviolent campaign of noncooperation with the British. Officials imprisoned numerous nationalists for this action. In 1942, the British tried to gain the support of the nationalists by promising governmental changes after the war. But the offer did not include Indian independence.

As they intensified their struggle against the British, Indians also struggled with each other. India has long been home to two main religious groups. In the 1940s, India had approximately 350 million Hindus and about 100 million Muslims. The Indian National Congress, or the Congress Party, was India's national political party. Most members of the Congress Party were Hindus, but the party at times had many Muslim members.

In competition with the Congress Party was the Muslim League, an organization founded in 1906 in India to protect Muslim interests. Members of the league felt that the mainly Hindu Congress Party looked out primarily for Hindu interests. The leader of the Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, insisted that all Muslims resign from the Congress Party. The Muslim League stated that it would never accept Indian independence if it meant rule by the Hindu-dominated Congress Party. Jinnah stated, "The only thing the Muslim has in common with the Hindu is his slavery to the British."

## Freedom Brings Turmoil

When World War II ended, Britain found itself faced with enormous war debts. As a result, British leaders began to rethink the expense of maintaining and governing distant colonies. With India continuing to push for independence, the stage was set for the British to hand over power. However, a key problem emerged: Who should receive the power—Hindus or Muslims?

Muslims resisted attempts to include them in an Indian government dominated by Hindus. Rioting between the two groups broke out in several Indian cities. In August 1946, four days of clashes in Calcutta left more than 5,000 people dead and more than 15,000 hurt. British officials soon became convinced that partition, an idea first proposed by India's Muslims, would be the only way to ensure a safe and secure region. Partition was the term given to the division of India into separate Hindu and Muslim nations. The northwest and eastern regions of India, where most Muslims lived, would become the new nation of Pakistan.

The British House of Commons passed an act on July 16, 1947, that granted two nations, India and Pakistan, independence in one month's time. In that short period, more than 500 independent native princes had to decide which nation they would join. The administration of the courts, the military, the railways, and the police—the whole of the civil service—had to be divided down to the last paper clip. Most difficult of all, millions of Indian citizens—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—had to decide where to go.

During the summer of 1947, 10 million people were on the move in the Indian subcontinent. As people scrambled to relocate, violence among the different religious groups erupted. Muslims killed Sikhs who were moving into India. Hindus and Sikhs killed Muslims who were headed into Pakistan. In all, an estimated 1 million died. "What is there to celebrate?" Gandhi mourned. "I see nothing but rivers of blood." Gandhi personally went to the Indian capital of Delhi to plead for fair treatment of Muslim refugees. While there, he himself became a victim of the nation's violence. A Hindu extremist who thought Gandhi too protective of Muslims shot and killed him on January 30, 1948.

As if partition itself didn't result in enough bloodshed between India's Muslims and Hindus, the two groups quickly squared off over the small region of Kashmir. Kashmir lay at the northern point of India next to Pakistan. Although its ruler was Hindu, Kashmir had a majority Muslim population. Shortly after independence, India and Pakistan began battling each other for control of the region. The fighting continued until the United Nations arranged a cease-fire in 1949. The cease-fire left a third of Kashmir under Pakistani control and the rest under Indian control. The two countries continue to fight over the region today.

## Modern India

With the granting of its independence on August 15, 1947, India became the world's largest democracy. Jawaharlal Nehru, the independent nation's first prime minister, served as India's leader for its first 17 years of independence. He had been one of Gandhi's most devoted followers. Educated in Britain, Nehru won popularity among all groups in India. He emphasized democracy, unity, and economic modernization. Nehru used his leadership to move India forward. He led other newly independent nations of the world in forming an alliance of countries that were neutral in the Cold War conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union. On the home front, Nehru called for a reorganization of the states by language. He also pushed for industrialization and sponsored social reforms. He tried to elevate the status of lower castes, and help women gain rights promised by the constitution. Nehru died in 1964. His death left the Congress Party with no leader strong enough to hold together the many political factions that had emerged with India's independence. Then, in 1966, Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, was chosen prime minister. After a short spell out of office, she was reelected in 1980. Although she ruled capably, Gandhi faced many challenges, including the growing threat from Sikh extremists who themselves wanted an independent state. The Golden Temple at Amritsar stood as the religious

center for the Sikhs. From there, Sikh nationalists ventured out to attack symbols of Indian authority. In June 1984, Indian army troops overran the Golden Temple. They killed about 500 Sikhs and destroyed sacred property. In retaliation, Sikh bodyguards assigned to Indira Gandhi gunned her down.

This violent act set off another murderous frenzy, causing the deaths of thousands of Sikhs. In the wake of the murder of Indira Gandhi, her son, Rajiv (rah•JEEV) Gandhi, took over as prime minister. His party, however, lost its power in 1989 because of accusations of widespread corruption. In 1991, while campaigning again for prime minister near the town of Madras, Rajiv was killed by a bomb. Members of a group opposed to his policies claimed responsibility.

### **Twenty-First Century Challenges**

Since winning election as prime minister in 1998, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of the Hindu nationalist party, has ruled over a vibrant but often unstable nation. He faces challenges brought on by an increasing population that is expected to push India past China as the world's most populous nation by 2035. In addition, the country is racked with social inequality and constantly threatened by religious strife.

Even more troubling are India's tense relations with its neighbor Pakistan, and the fact that both have become nuclear powers. In 1974, India exploded a "peaceful" nuclear device. For the next 24 years, the nation quietly worked on building up its nuclear capability. In 1998, Indian officials conducted five underground nuclear tests. Meanwhile, the Pakistanis had been building their own nuclear program. Shortly after India conducted its nuclear tests, Pakistan demonstrated that it, too, had nuclear weapons. The presence of these weapons in the hands of such bitter enemies and neighbors has become a matter of great international concern, especially in light of their continuing struggle over Kashmir. In 2002, the two nations came close to war over Kashmir. However, in 2003 a peace process began to ease tension.

### **Pakistan Copes with Freedom**

The history of Pakistan since independence has been no less turbulent than that of India. Pakistan actually began as two separate and divided states, East Pakistan and West Pakistan. East Pakistan lay to the east of India, West Pakistan to the northwest. These regions were separated by more than 1,000 miles of Indian territory. In culture, language, history, geography, economics, and ethnic background, the two regions were very different. Only the Islamic religion united them.

From the beginning, the two regions of Pakistan experienced strained relations. While East Pakistan had the larger population, it was often ignored by West Pakistan, home to the central government. In 1970, a giant cyclone and tidal wave struck East Pakistan and killed an estimated 266,000 residents. While international aid poured into Pakistan, the government in West Pakistan did not quickly transfer that aid to East Pakistan. Demonstrations broke out in East Pakistan, and protesters called for an end to all ties with West Pakistan.

On March 26, 1971, East Pakistan declared itself an independent nation called Bangladesh. A civil war followed between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Eventually, Indian forces stepped in and sided with Bangladesh. Pakistan forces surrendered. More than 1 million people died in the war. Pakistan lost about one-seventh of its area and about one-half of its population to Bangladesh.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the first governor-general of Pakistan, died shortly after independence. This left the nation without strong leadership, and Pakistan went through a series of military coups, the first in 1958. Ali Bhutto took control of the country following the civil war. A military coup in 1977 led by General Zia removed Bhutto, who was later executed for crimes allegedly committed while in office.

After Zia's death, Bhutto's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, was twice elected prime minister. After months of disorder, she was removed from office in 1996. Nawaz Sharif became prime minister after the 1997 elections. In 1999, army leaders led by General Pervez Musharraf ousted Sharif in yet another coup and imposed military rule over Pakistan. After the September 11 attacks on the United States, Musharraf became a key American ally. By 2007, however, he faced growing political opposition at home.

Beck, Roger B. *World History: Patterns of Interaction*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2015.

# India and Pakistan Partition Map



# Primary Sources:

## Source 1:

Source: Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, "Two Nations" speech, delivered to Muslim League's in 1940

If the British Government really wants to secure the peace and happiness of the people of this Subcontinent, the only course open to us is to allow Hindus and Muslims separate homelands, by dividing India into "autonomous national States." It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders. It is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality. This misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of most of our troubles and will lead India to destruction, if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature. They neither intermarry, nor inter-dine together, and indeed they belong to two different civilizations, which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. To yoke [join] together two such nations under a single State, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and the final destruction of the government of such a State.

Muslim India cannot accept any Constitution that will lead to a Hindu majority Government. The Muslims are a nation according to any definition of a nation, and they must have their homelands, their territory and their State. We wish to live in peace and harmony with our neighbors as a free and independent people.

## Source 2:

Source: *The Discovery of India*, by Jawaharlal Nehru, 1946, India's first Prime Minister; the book was written between 1942-1945 when he was in prison for civil disobedience.

Any division of India on a religious basis as between Hindus and Muslims, as proposed by the Moslem League today, cannot separate the followers of these two principal religions of India, for they are spread out all over the country. Even if the areas in which each group is in a majority are separated, huge minorities belonging to the other group remain in each area. Other religious groups, like the Sikhs, are split up unfairly against their will and placed in two different states. In giving freedom to separate to one group, other groups are denied that freedom . . . If the economic aspects of separation are considered, it is clear that India as a whole is a strong and more-or-less self-sufficient economic unit. If the division is made so as to separate the predominately Hindu and Muslim areas, the Hindu areas will not be so hard hit. The Muslim areas, on the other hand, will be economically backward. Thus, the odd fact emerges that those who today demand separation will suffer the most from it. The astonishing fact remains that those who propose "Pakistan" or partition have consistently refused to define what they mean or to consider the implications of such a division. They move on the emotional plane only . . . It is difficult to imagine any free state emerging from such turmoil, and if something does emerge, it will be full of contradictions and insoluble problems.