

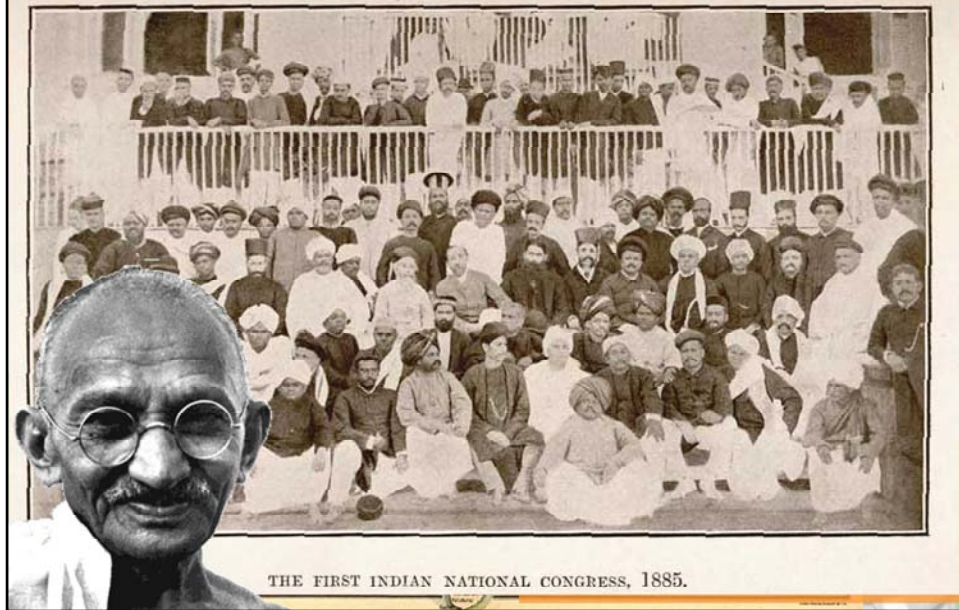
By the 1600s, the British East India Company had established trade routes along the coast of India. Over time, as the Mughal Empire went into decline, the East India Company gained more power until it established control over much of the Indian subcontinent, a territory which includes modern-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma and India.

Revolts against the East India Company led Great Britain to take direct control over the territory by 1860, establishing this area as a colony of the British Empire. This territory also included Burma, which is now known as Myanmar.

The Indian colony was regarded as the “crown jewel” of the British Empire, because it was its richest and most important colonial possession.

[Image of Jawaharlal Nehru courtesy German Federal Archive.]

Beginnings of Independence



Britain brought some modern technologies to the colony, including roads, canals, and railroads. This map shows the extent of India's railroads in 1909 when the country had the fourth largest railroad network in the world.

The Indians, however, did not share equal rights with the British. In 1885, Indian nationalists formed the Indian National Congress, which wanted greater control for Indians over their government. The Indian National Congress was initially loyal to the British crown, but by the early 1900s, the organization wanted full independence.

In 1915, Mohandas Gandhi became the leader of the Indian National Congress. His popularity with the common people was the catalyst that helped the independence movement gain momentum. Millions joined his movement.

Gandhi was an educated man who rejected material goods and led a very simple life with few luxuries. In most pictures from later in his life, he is shown wearing only a simple white robe, even when meeting with heads of state and other powerful people. He became the most important leader for Indian Independence.



Although Gandhi was committed to gaining independence for India, he tried to do it using nonviolent methods, specifically civil disobedience and passive, or non-violent, resistance.

Civil disobedience is the refusal by people to obey certain government laws. Gandhi's followers would not follow certain laws passed by the British as an act of protest. Gandhi's followers practiced passive resistance, meaning they used non-violent means to achieve their goals.

Gandhi and his followers also boycotted, or refused to buy, British goods and refused to pay British taxes. One of Gandhi's most famous protests was the 1930 Salt March, which protested Britain's salt tax.


While Gandhi urged that non-violent protest was the best way to win independence, the British arrested protestors, which often sparked riots. Gandhi was arrested and spent two years in prison. After he was released, he found that unity between the Muslims and Hindus, which he believed was crucial to independence, had fallen apart.

All-India Muslim League

India's Independence movement was split along Hindu-Muslim lines

Muslims
All-India Muslim League

Hindus
Indian National Congress

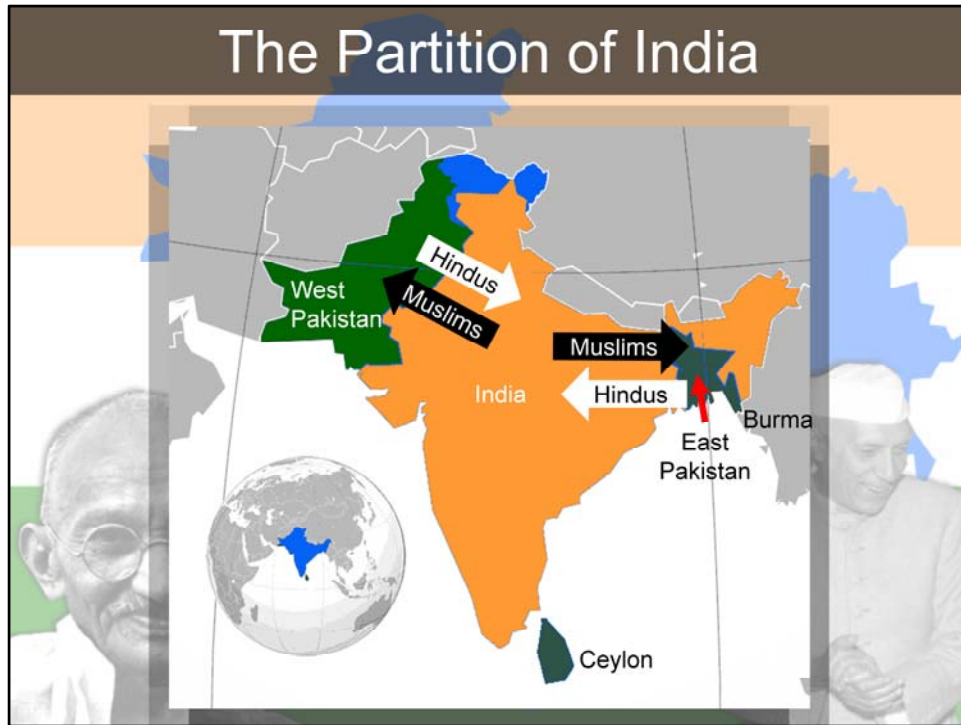


Members of Muslim League meet at Lahore in 1940 where they formally recommend creation of a Muslim-majority state.

The Indian National Congress wasn't the only movement for independence in the colony. The All-India Muslim League was founded in 1906 to promote the rights of the Muslim minority in the Indian colony. Muslims made up 25% of the total population in the country, mostly in the northern regions. The rest of the country was predominantly Hindu, with some Sikhs and other religions.

At first, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League worked together to advance the cause of Indian independence. Cooperation between the two groups broke down while Gandhi was in prison. The Muslim League argued that they could not live under the Hindu majority.

By 1940, the leaders of the Muslim League were campaigning for an independent region in northwest and northeast India to form a Muslim-majority country.



After World War II, Britain did not have the resources to rule over India as more Indians began to resist colonial rule. As a result, the colonizers set 1948 as the year that India would become independent.

With a date for independence set, clashes between Muslims and Hindus became more violent. The prospect of civil war in a post-independence India was a very real possibility. As a result, the British government decided to move up the date of independence to August 1947, and to partition, or break up, the colony into four new independent countries: Hindu-dominated India, Muslim-dominated Pakistan, Burma, now known as Myanmar, and the island of Ceylon, later renamed Sri Lanka.

Fearing violence and civil unrest that might come after independence, millions of Muslims and Hindus migrated to areas in which they would join the majority. Nearly ten million people left their homes to cross what would soon be international borders. Violent clashes between the two groups left at least 500,000 civilians dead.

In January of 1948, Gandhi became a victim of post-independence violence when he was shot by a Hindu radical who did not agree with Gandhi's reforms.

Post-Independence India

Jawaharlal Nehru
Prime Minister 1947-1964

Republic of India

- > World's largest democracy
- > Federal system of gov't

1950 Constitution
Banned caste system

Ethnic & religious differences
have hindered democracy

Jawaharlal Nehru, a close associate of Gandhi, emerged as the leader of the Indian National Congress after Gandhi's assassination. He became the first Prime Minister of India and led the country from 1947 to 1964. The Republic of India was, and still is, the world's largest democratic nation. The country has a federal system of government, similar to the United States, with state governments having a number of powers that aren't part of the national government's laws.

The 1950 Constitution sought to prohibit caste discrimination by banning it. Nehru's government helped the lower castes find jobs and also set aside spots for them to attend Indian universities. Although banned, the caste system still plays a role in Indian society. Often, higher castes receive better schooling and better job opportunities.

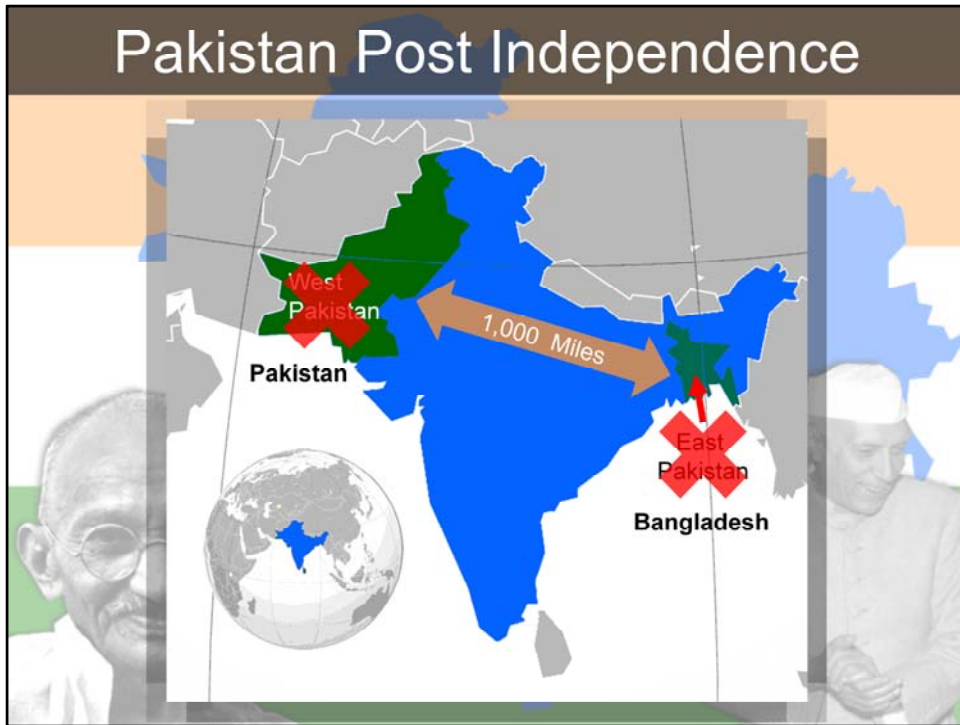
Religious and ethnic differences have caused problems in the development of India as a democratic nation. Some of its political parties appeal only to people of a certain religion or people who come from a specific region. Periodically, there have been outbreaks of violence between Hindus and Muslims, or against other groups who are not part of the majority.



When he took office, Nehru's main goal was to strengthen India's economy through western-style industrialization. He tried to do this through a mixed economy where the national government would play a large role. Although free market capitalism was allowed, the government controlled the most important industries. This government involvement in the economy led some people in the United States to assume that India would align itself with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. This was not the case. Nehru actually founded the Non-Aligned Movement, a group of countries who did not ally themselves with either superpower.

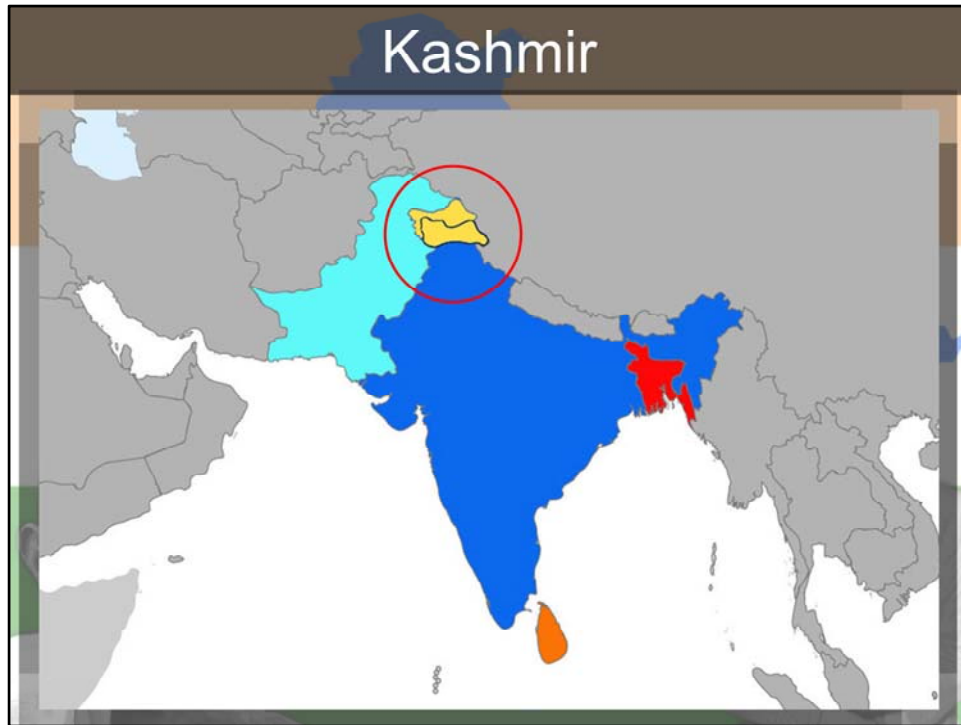
India's economy has become much more capitalist in recent years, and has experienced much higher growth rates as a result. Its large English-speaking workforce and relatively low wages have made the country a popular place for many of the world's largest companies to set up operations. The country's high rate of economic growth is expected to continue in the near future. This economic development has helped to ease some of the nation's financial problems. Many people in the country, however, remain relatively poor despite this new wealth.

[Image of stock exchange courtesy Elroy Serrao. Image of buildings and shacks courtesy K. R. Ranjith]



At independence, Pakistan was made up of West Pakistan and East Pakistan, which were separated by 1,000 miles of Indian territory. East Pakistan began to resent West Pakistan's dominance of the government, military, and economy. The two regions shared a religion, Islam, but had little else in common. In 1971, with the aid of India, East Pakistan successfully fought to secede and created the independent country of Bangladesh.

Recently, Pakistan has been an important ally in the United States' war in Afghanistan, although there have been some tensions between the two countries.



One of the continuing sources of tension between religious groups in India and Pakistan, as well as the two countries themselves, is the region known as Kashmir. When the British partitioned the Indian colony at independence, they didn't set the border for this region. India and Pakistan immediately went to war over this mostly Muslim region, but there was no clear winner. The two countries fought another war in 1965, and have had a number of border skirmishes occur over this region. Kashmir still remains a source of tension between the two rivals, which both have nuclear weapons.