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# The Indian Subcontinent Achieves Freedom

### MAIN IDEA

**POWER AND AUTHORITY** New nations emerged from the British colony of India.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

India today is the largest democracy in the world.

### TERMS & NAMES

- Congress Party
- Muslim League
- Muhammad Ali Jinnah
- partition
- Jawaharlal Nehru
- Indira Gandhi
- Benazir Bhutto

**SETTING THE STAGE** After World War II, dramatic political changes began to take place across the world. This was especially the case with regard to the policy of colonialism. Countries that held colonies began to question the practice. After the world struggle against dictatorship, many leaders argued that no country should control another nation. Others questioned the high cost and commitment of holding colonies. Meanwhile, the people of colonized regions continued to press even harder for their freedom. All of this led to independence for one of the largest and most populous colonies in the world: British-held India.

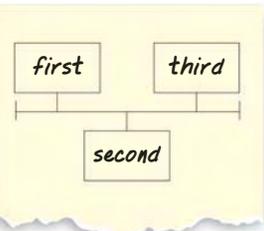
## A Movement Toward Independence

The British had ruled India for almost two centuries. Indian resistance to Britain, which had existed from the beginning, 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** (mu•HAM•ihd ah•LEE JINH•uh), 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.”

**TAKING NOTES**  
**Following Chronological Order** Create a time line of prominent Indian prime ministers from independence through the current day.



## 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?

**Partition and Bloodshed** 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. (Pakistan, as the map shows, comprised two separate states in 1947: West Pakistan and East 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 yet another significant religious group, the 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. The following passage is representative of the experiences of people in both the Hindu and Muslim communities:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

All passengers were forced into compartments like sheep and goats. Because of which the heat and suffocating atmosphere was intensified and it was very hard to breathe. In the ladies compartment women and children were in a terrible condition. Women tried in vain to calm down and comfort their children. If you looked out the window you could see dead bodies lying in the distance. At many places you could see corpses piled on top of each other and no one seemed to have any concern. . . . These were the scenes that made your heart bleed and everybody loudly repented their sins and recited verses asking God's forgiveness. Every moment seemed to be the most terrifying and agonizing.

**ZAHIDA AMJAD ALI**, quoted in *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities*

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.

**The Battle for Kashmir** 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. **A**

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**A** What was the cause of the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir?

## Modern India

With the granting of its independence on August 15, 1947, India became the world's largest democracy. As the long-awaited hour of India's freedom approached, **Jawaharlal Nehru**, the independent nation's first prime minister, addressed the country's political leaders:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

Long years ago, we made a tryst [appointment] with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will wake to life and freedom.

**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU**, speech before the Constituent Assembly, August 14, 1947

## Connect to Today

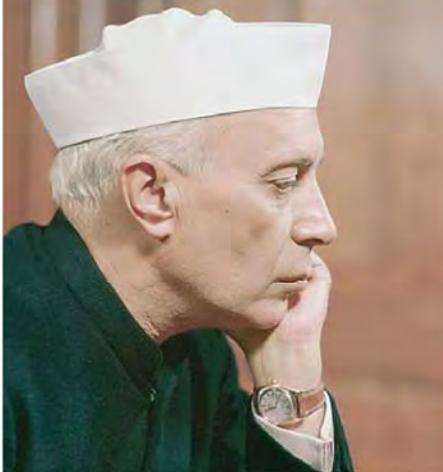


### The Coldest War

No part of Kashmir is beyond a fight for India and Pakistan—including the giant Siachen glacier high above the region. The dividing line established by the 1949 cease-fire did not extend to the glacier because officials figured neither side would try to occupy such a barren and frigid strip of land.

They figured wrong. In 1984, both sides sent troops to take the glacier, and they have been dug in ever since. At altitudes nearing 21,000 feet, Indian and Pakistani soldiers shoot at each other from trenches in temperatures that reach 70 degrees below zero. This bitterly cold war was interrupted in 2003 when Pakistan and India declared a ceasefire.

## History Makers



### Jawaharlal Nehru 1889–1964

Nehru's father was an influential attorney, and so the first prime minister of India grew up amid great wealth. As a young man, he lived and studied in England. "In my likes and dislikes I was perhaps more an Englishman than an Indian," he once remarked.

Upon returning to India, however, he became moved by the horrible state in which many of his fellow Indians lived. "A new picture of India seemed to rise before me," he recalled, "naked, starving, crushed, and utterly miserable." From then on, he devoted his life to improving conditions in his country.

#### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on Jawaharlal Nehru, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)

**Nehru Leads India** Nehru 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 the lower castes, or those at the bottom of society, and help women gain the rights promised by the constitution.

**Troubled Times** 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:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

Now that India and Pakistan have tested nuclear weapons . . . [There is] fear that a remote but savage ethnic and religious conflict could deteriorate into a nuclear exchange with global consequences. India and Pakistan must learn to talk to each other and move toward a more trusting relationship.

*The New York Times*, June 28, 1998

In 2002, the two nations came close to war over Kashmir. However, in 2003 a peace process began to ease tension.

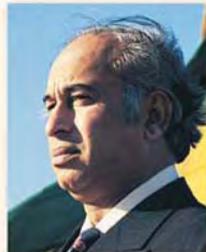
## Pakistan Copes with Freedom

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.

**Civil War** 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.

### A Turbulent History

#### Pakistan



#### 1977 Ali Bhutto

Prime Minister Ali Bhutto of Pakistan is deposed in a coup led by General Zia. Bhutto is later hanged for having ordered the assassination of a political opponent.

#### 1988

General Zia, president of Pakistan, dies in a mysterious plane crash.

#### 1999

General Pervez Musharraf seizes control of government in a military coup.

#### India

#### 1948 Mohandas Gandhi

Gandhi is shot to death by a Hindu extremist. The assassin opposes Gandhi's efforts to achieve equal treatment for all Indians, including Muslims.



#### 1984 Indira Gandhi

Indira Gandhi is gunned down by two of her Sikh bodyguards. Her murder is in retaliation for an attack she ordered on a Sikh temple.

#### 1991 Rajiv Gandhi

Rajiv Gandhi is killed by a bomb while campaigning. The bomb is carried by a woman opposed to Gandhi's policies.



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. **B**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Comparing**

**B** How does the history of Pakistan in 1971 parallel the history of India in 1947?

**A Pattern of Instability** 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.

## Bangladesh and Sri Lanka Struggle

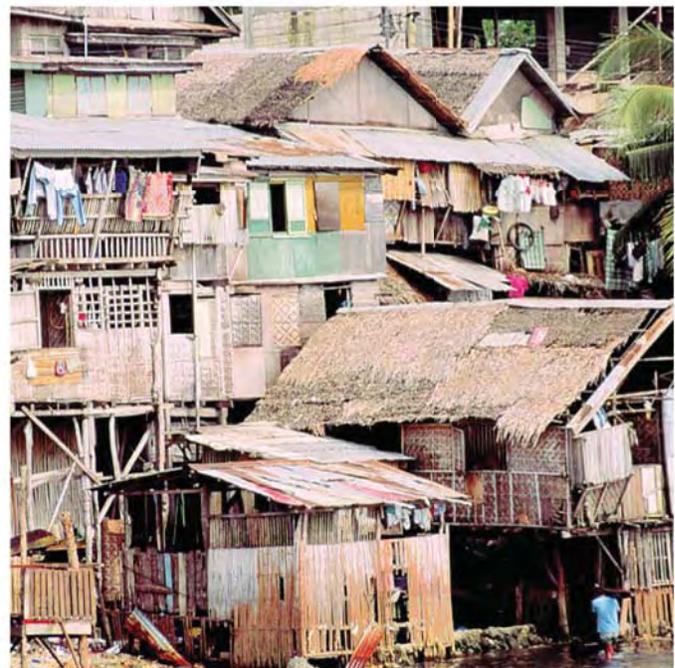
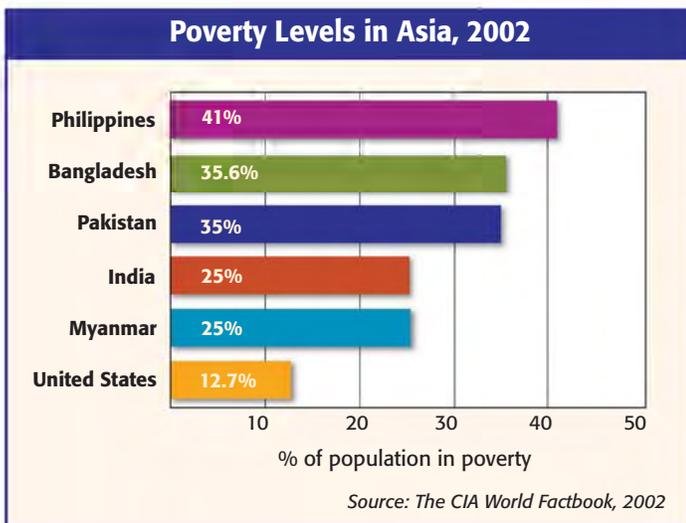
Meanwhile, the newly created nations of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka struggled with enormous problems of their own in the decades following independence.

**Bangladesh Faces Many Problems** The war with Pakistan had ruined the economy of Bangladesh and fractured its communications system. Rebuilding the shattered country seemed like an overwhelming task. Sheik Mujibur Rahman became the nation's first prime minister. He appeared more interested in strengthening his own power than in rebuilding his nation. He soon took over all authority and declared Bangladesh a one-party state. In August 1975, military leaders assassinated him.

Over the years Bangladesh has attempted with great difficulty to create a more democratic form of government. Charges of election fraud and government corruption are common. In recent years, however, the government has become more stable. The latest elections were held in October of 2001, and Begum Khaleda Zia took over as the nation's prime minister.

Bangladesh also has had to cope with crippling natural disasters. Bangladesh is a low-lying nation that is subject to many cyclones and tidal waves. Massive storms

▼ Overcrowded and poor villages are a common sight throughout Bangladesh.

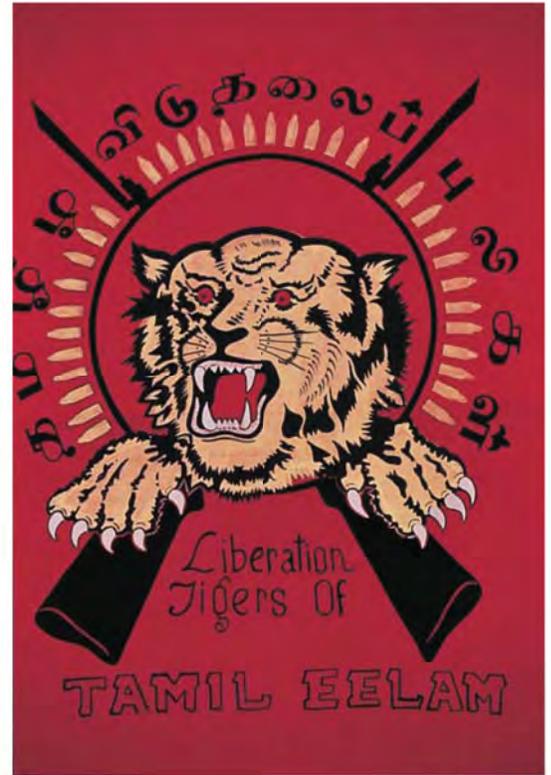


regularly flood the land, ruin crops and homes, and take lives. A cyclone in 1991 killed approximately 139,000 people. Such catastrophes, along with a rapidly growing population, have put much stress on the country's economy. Bangladesh is one of the poorest nations in the world. The per capita income there is about \$360 per year.

**Civil Strife Grips Sri Lanka** Another newly freed and deeply troubled country on the Indian subcontinent is Sri Lanka, a small, teardrop-shaped island nation just off the southeast coast of India. Formerly known as Ceylon, Sri Lanka gained its independence from Britain in February of 1948. Two main ethnic groups dominate the nation. Three-quarters of the population are Sinhalese, who are Buddhists. A fifth are Tamils, a Hindu people of southern India and northern Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's recent history has also been one of turmoil. A militant group of Tamils has long fought an armed struggle for a separate Tamil nation. Since 1981, thousands of lives have been lost. In an effort to end the violence, Rajiv Gandhi and the Sri Lankan president tried to reach an accord in 1987. The agreement called for Indian troops to enter Sri Lanka and help disarm Tamil rebels. This effort was not successful, and the Indian troops left in 1990. A civil war between Tamils and other Sri Lankans continues today.

As difficult as post-independence has been for the countries of the Indian subcontinent, the same can be said for former colonies elsewhere. As you will read in the next section, a number of formerly held territories in Southeast Asia faced challenges as they became independent nations.



▲ This emblem of the separatist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam represents the struggle for independence of the Tamils.

SECTION

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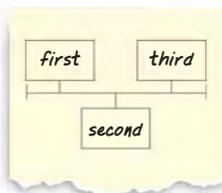
ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Congress Party
- Muslim League
- Muhammad Ali Jinnah
- partition
- Jawaharlal Nehru
- Indira Gandhi
- Benazir Bhutto

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. What tragic connection did many of the leaders share?



**MAIN IDEAS**

3. Why did British officials partition India into India and Pakistan?
4. In what way did Pakistan also undergo a partition?
5. What is the main cause today of civil strife in Sri Lanka?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **SYNTHESIZING** Why might India's political and economic success be so crucial to the future of democracy in Asia?
7. **ANALYZING ISSUES** How did religious and cultural differences create problems for newly emerging nations?
8. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** Why has the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir become such a concern to the world today?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** Write several paragraphs detailing the problems shared by leaders of India and Pakistan.

**CONNECT TO TODAY** CREATING A GRAPHIC

Research the current percentages of religions in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka. Create a **graphic** of your choosing to illustrate your findings.