

India - Past, Present and the Future



The Jewel of the Crown

The British began ruling India in 1757. The British East India Company's own army defeated an army led by the Governor of Bengal outside of the city of Calcutta.

[Sir Robert Clive at the Battle of Plassy]

This British rule, financed by both private corporations and the British Crown would last until 1947 when India would be granted its independence.

The British policy of "divide and conquer" was harsh and racist. The 400 million people of India were heavily taxed, most of the funds going directly to England to finance the Industrial Revolution. In addition, poor agricultural techniques and methods created devastating famines in India in the 1700s and 1780s that killed many of the poor in both rural and urban areas.

British Imperialism did have some positive effects on India. A Western legal system was adopted based on British democratic models advocating individual and social rights. India's infrastructure was greatly improved due to the telegraph and railway systems. Education received a high priority, the end result being the adoption of English as a second language that united the Indian people who had previously spoken several regional languages.

The First Signs of Unrest and Broken Promises

The Sepoy Rebellion or Mutiny in 1857 was an early sign of revolt against British rule but it was not until the end of World War I that India began a period of nationalism and looked for its own independence. During the Great War, about 1 million Indian soldiers fought on the side of the Triple Entente and for this the British government promised the raj (the British administration in India) their own self-government after the war was over.

In 1919 the British government passed the Rowlatt Acts that gave them the power to put down any public unrest in a colony. This counteracted their promise of self-government and many protests against the British broke out in India.

Gandhi Returns to India

In 1914 Mohandas Gandhi returned to India from South Africa. He had left India in 1893 to practice law in South Africa. There that he was forced from a first-class compartment on a train and told to take a seat in a third-class compartment so that a white man could have his seat. He refused to leave and was subsequently arrested. He would later state that this was his “moment of truth” and the turning point for his fight against injustice. His movement would rely on “civil disobedience” or non-violent protest.



Mohandas Gandhi

When Gandhi returned to India he first founded a Hindu commune in Ahmedabad, north of Bombay (Mumbai). Gandhi was like no other political figure in his day. He was a small, thin man who was a vegetarian and dressed in nothing but a white cotton loincloth and shawl. His influence over the Indian people came from his speeches. He always spoke quietly, giving the people a sense of feeling that he was speaking directly to them. His message was powerful, non-violent protests that would lead to independence.

Civil Disobedience Acts begin



In response to the Rowlatt Acts, Gandhi led several day protests that closed down businesses throughout the country. For this violation of British law, he was subsequently arrested and jailed. The protests continued while he was in jail. On April 13, 1919, at a demonstration in Amritsar, British troops opened fire on the demonstrators, killing over 400 non-violent protestors.

This massacre united the Indian people and Gandhi became their sole leader. He was given the name of Mahatma, a name taken from the Sanskrit language meaning “great soul.” Gandhi’s first move was to call for a campaign of “non-cooperation” with the British regime. Students did not go to schools that were taught by the British, commercial boycotts of British goods took place and many Indian born public officials resigned from office. Demonstrations clogged the streets of many cities and the crowds vowed not to move when the British troops arrived.

The Independence Movement

In 1930, Gandhi's political party, the National Congress, declared its goal of independence from Britain. Gandhi called for the refusal of tax payments to the government with the intent of bringing them to financial disaster. He then began the Great Salt March, a 240-mile long protest against the British for not allowing the people of India to produce their own salt. Once again Gandhi was arrested. Global awareness of Gandhi's arrest and his subsequent hunger-strike brought international attention to the region. This pressure forced the British into his release in 1931.

When World War II broke out in Europe, Britain again demanded that Indian soldiers serve in the war on the side of the Allies. Gandhi and his political associate, Jawaharlal Nehru stated that they would not support Britain unless India was granted immediate independence. Britain refused to back down to these demands. Gandhi and Nehru then began their "Quit India" campaign and began another round of protests. The British immediately arrested Gandhi and approximately 100,000 of his supporters.

When the war finally came to an end in 1945, Britain had neither the financial or military power to keep tight control over India.

Political Separation within India

Post War India not only had a population of 240 million Hindus but there were 90 million Muslims living within the country. They too had their own political party, the Indian National Congress, informally known as the Congress Party, Their leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah took a stance for a separate state for the Muslims but Gandhi decisively opposed this demand. In 1946, when the British allowed an interim government to be formed in India, appointing Jawaharlal Nehru as prime minister, relations between the Muslims and Hindus became tense. Riots began across the nation, especially in the predominantly Muslim northwest and northeast areas of the peninsula. The Muslim League fought for their own independence and the area was close to civil war.



Muhammad Ali Jinnah

The Partition of India

When World War II ended, Britain went through a time of major political change. Churchill's Conservative Party was replaced by the Labour Party, led by Clement Atlee. Fighting between Muslims and Hindus continued in the regions of Bombay, East Bengal and Calcutta. In August of 1946, riots in Calcutta left over 5,000 dead and 15,000 seriously injured. The British viceroy (the person who governs on behalf of the monarch) Lord Louis Mountbatten, in fear of civil war, mandated the Partition of India into two nations.

On July 16, 1947, the British House of Commons passed this act creating the Hindu nation of India and the Muslim nation of Pakistan. During the summer of 1947 mass migrations of both Hindus and Muslims took place within the subcontinent. Over 500 independent native princes had to decide which religion they followed. Every last detail of the governments, civil service, railways, businesses, military and the police force had to be equally divided into two sects.

On August 14th and the 15th of 1947, Pakistan, and then India, became separate countries. People now had to choose to which nation they belonged. In addition, the northern region of Kashmir became the battleground between Hindus and Muslims as both believed they should control the region. A second war will take place in 1965 and the dispute over Kashmir continues today despite the United Nations creating a cease-fire line in 1949.

During these relocations, massacres took place between the two religions. Muslims killed Sikhs who were trying to move to India and Hindus and Sikhs killed Muslims who were trying to reach the safety of Pakistan. In total, an estimated one-million people died just trying to reach religious safety. Approximately 10 million people became refugees.

On January 30th, 1948, Gandhi went to Delhi to demand fair treatment to all people. He was shot by a Hindu extremist who believed that he was too protective of Muslims.

Modern India emerges, but not without further violence

Jawaharlal Nehru became the prime minister of India. His political party ran on a platform of democracy, unity, and economic modernization. He managed to remain neutral during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. He advocated for the elevation of the lower castes and the expansion of women's rights.

When Nehru died in 1964, the Congress Party had no strong leadership. That was, until 1966, when his daughter, Indira Gandhi was chosen as the country's prime minister. Under her rule, India became a major economic power while Pakistan faced political differences, unstable governments and intrusion from Islamic extremists.

Indira Gandhi's rule was not without violence. In the 1980s she had to send Indian troops at Amritsar and put down Sikh terrorists who had seized the Golden Temple. Her troops killed 500 Sikhs in addition to damaging this sacred sight. In retaliation, four months later, Indira Gandhi was killed by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

Gandhi was succeeded by her son, Rajiv Gandhi. His party ruled for five years but lost favor due to political corruption. He was assassinated by a female terrorist from Sri Lanka in 1991.

The fate of Pakistan

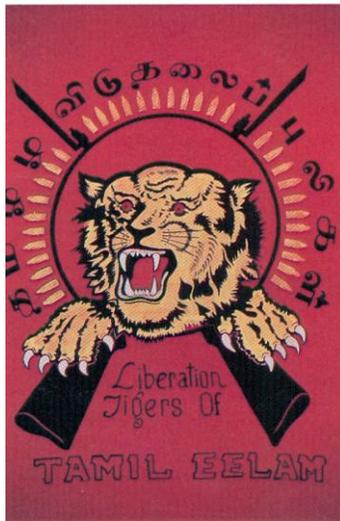
In addition to Pakistan gaining its independence in 1947, the island of Ceylon was also given its independence from Britain in the following year. Both nations fell victim to intense religious and ethnic fighting. In 1972, Ceylon officially changed its name to Sri Lanka.

Pakistan began as a divided nation. Two countries were formed, West Pakistan and East Pakistan, separated by 1,000 miles and the country of India. Muslims lived in both the western and eastern regions of the subcontinent. In culture, language, and geography both Pakistans were very different. East Pakistan had a larger population than West Pakistan even though their government was located in the west. In 1971, a rebellion for the independence of East Pakistan began. The army of West Pakistan began to occupy East Pakistan but due to interference from India, they retreated and the new nation of Bangladesh was formed.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah died shortly after the formation of Bangladesh. Pakistan went through a series of military coups. In 1958, Ali Bhutto ruled but he was removed in 1977 by a coup led by General Zia. He had Bhutto executed for crimes allegedly committed while in office. Bangladesh was then to witness several seasonal droughts and famines that would kill millions. Thanks to several musicians, headed by the former Beatle George Harrison, Bangladesh's dire situation would receive global recognition and assistance.

Once Zia died, he was replaced by Benazir Bhutto, Ali Bhutto's daughter, but she was removed from office in 1996 and replaced by Nawaz Sharif. Benazir Bhutto was assassinated upon her return several years later.

Trouble in Sri Lanka



Sri Lanka has a population of 16 million people but they are not of the same religion. Three-quarters are Buddhists, one-fifth are Tamils, who are Hindus from southern India and northern Sri Lanka. Since 1981, a militant group, the Tamil Tigers, have waged a political resistance campaign using violence as a way to achieve their goal. India attempted to bring peace to the region in 1983 but could not bring the violence to a halt. In 1990 the Indian government was forced to remove their troops and the domestic violence continued until recently when the Tamil Tigers signed a peace treaty.

India and Pakistan today

Despite India's population reaching over 1.2 billion people, it is the world's largest democracy. Poverty and religious violence still continues. The Hindus and Sikhs still continue their disputes but they are united over the issue of Pakistan.

Pakistan has remained militant in its ways and Muslim extremism is growing daily within the nation. Tensions between India and Pakistan have led them to the brink of war several times. Both nations still dispute over the rule of Kashmir.

Both India and Pakistan now have nuclear weapons and border tensions persist. Suicide bombings still continue in the cities of Pakistan and India, both nations blaming the other for these tragic events. India is seen as a major trading partner with the United States and the European Union. Pakistan is seen as a major ally of the United States against the "war on terrorism" and its location close to Afghanistan, has made it an area of major significance. The killing of Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the September 11th attack on America, has severely strained relations between Pakistan and the United States and other nations of the free world. The emergence of China as a global superpower is currently focusing its economic interests towards both India and Pakistan. Their vast populations are seen as formidable markets for their industries.

"With most of the world's nuclear powers and some half of humanity, Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress."

Barack Obama: *Upfront Magazine*, The New York Times, January 30, 2012, p. 19



Sources: Beck, Roger B., Black, Krieger, Naylor and Ibo Shabaka: *World History, Patterns of Interaction*. Boston: McDougal Littell, pp. 785-787, 885-889

Upfront Magazine, The New York Times, January 30, 2012, pp 16-19

Timeline for India and Pakistan

Year	Event
1757	British win the Battle of Plassy and begin their Imperialism of India
1858	The India Act transfers power from the British East India Company to the British monarchy led by Queen Victoria
1919-1930	Mohandas Gandhi rises to power after his return from South Africa. His civil disobedience campaign of non-violence begins. His boycotts and sit-ins lead to his National Congress Party declaring independence in 1930.
1940	Tensions between Hindus and Muslims within India begin and are followed with many outbreaks of religious violence. Mohammad Ali Jinnah calls for the partition of India into two nations, a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan
1947	Britain gives India and Pakistan their independence. 10 million people have to relocate to either Hindu India or Muslim Pakistan. There are many outbreaks of murder and violence. Millions are forced to become refugees.
1947 - 1971	War breaks out between India and Pakistan over who rules Kashmir. A second war will begin in 1965. In 1971, East Pakistan becomes Bangladesh after a war of independence
1998	Both India and Pakistan develop nuclear weapons and threaten to use them on each other several times. The U.S. and other nations impose sanctions on both countries. Border tensions between both countries are tense.
2001	After the attacks on the United States, Pakistan agrees to help fight Al Qaeda and bring down the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan
2008	Suicide attacks in India are blamed on Pakistani militants and tension between the two nations again heightens.
2011	U.S. Special forces kill Osama bin Laden who has been hiding out not far from Pakistan's capital city of Islamabad. The raid creates anger within the Pakistani government and upsets many fundamentalists within the country
2012	India has now asserted itself as a global power with one of the fastest growing global economies. Pakistan remains a comparatively poor and politically unstable nation.