



India and Pakistan

70 years of independence



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70 years ago in August 1947, the British left India after three hundred years of direct and indirect rule. Independent India and Pakistan came into being following a nationalist struggle lasting almost three decades. In July 1947, the British Parliament had passed the Indian Independence Act: it ordered that the dominions of India and Pakistan be demarcated by midnight of 14-15 August 1947. On 14 August 1947 just before midnight, Pakistan became independent and Muhammad Ali Jinnah was sworn in as its first Governor General. On 15 August 1947, India became a sovereign nation, a new cabinet headed by Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in and Lord Mountbatten was appointed Governor General. Tragically, chaos accompanied partition. An estimated ten million people moved across the new boundaries and one million civilians died in the accompanying violence, particularly in Punjab which was cut in two by the border.

The independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 was one of the key moments in twentieth-century history, not just for these two countries but for the world, as it greatly contributed to the dismantling of colonialism.

1885—First meeting of the Indian National Congress.

1906—Establishment of the All India Muslim League.

1919—Jallianwala Bagh massacre (Amritsar massacre).

1920 to 1922—Non-Cooperation Movement.

1929—Lord Irwin promises Dominion Status for India.

1930—Salt March and Civil Disobedience Movement.

1935—The Government of India Act receives Royal Assent.

1939—Viceroy Linlithgow declares that India is at war with Germany.

1940—Lahore Resolution: the Muslim League demands for a separate homeland for the Muslims of British India.

1942—Congress launches the 'Quit India Movement'. Gandhi, Nehru and all members of the Congress Working Committee are arrested.

1944— The Gandhi-Jinnah talks end in failure.

1945—Imprisoned Congress leaders are released.

Dec. 1945 to Jan. 1946 —General Elections in India. The Indian National Congress emerges as the largest party.

1946—March to June, Cabinet mission to India.

September, formation of the interim government of India with Nehru as the Vice-President.

1947— 20 February, Prime Minister Attlee announces the British intention of leaving India by June 1948 at the latest.

24 March, Lord Mountbatten is sworn in as Viceroy of India.

4 July, the Indian Independence Bill is published.

18 July, the Indian Independence Act receives royal assent.

14 August, Pakistan Independence—celebrations in Karachi.

15 August, India independence—celebrations in New Delhi.

1885 - First meeting of the Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress was the first modern nationalist movement to emerge in the British Empire, though the idea of an Indian organisation opposed to British rule dated from the 1850s. Its first session took place in Bombay in December 1885. The early Congress did not represent a significant new force and it was not very different from the political associations from which it had emerged. It represented the interests of the middle-class professions, mainly lawyers. The leadership stood for reform within the framework of British sovereignty and believed that it could influence government policy in India by lobbying in Britain. Even so, the Bombay Congress of 1885 is regarded as a turning point in formalising opposition to the Raj. The British were ambivalent towards Congress and their attitude convinced a younger generation of supporters that constitutional methods were fruitless and that they would have to become more assertive. By the end of the First World War, when Gandhi emerged as a national leader, Congress had evolved from its middle-class confines to a mass organisation with enough popular support to set in motion the campaigns which led to India's independence in 1947.

The Non-Cooperation Movement

On 13 April 1919, a crowd of protesters and pilgrims who had gathered in the Jallianwala Bagh garden in Amritsar in Punjab, were fired upon by troops of the British Indian Army. The soldiers fired on the crowd, aiming their bullets at the few open gates through which people were trying to escape. The Amritsar massacre, fuelled widespread anger and nationalist feelings across India and led to the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22. The movement, led by Gandhi, aimed to resist British rule through nonviolent means or 'Satyagraha' (roughly translated as 'insistence on truth' or 'truth force'). Activists boycotted British goods, government educational institutions, the courts, and refused to pay taxes. In time, the movement lost its non-violent nature and was called off. On 10 March 1922, Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to six years imprisonment on sedition charges.

The Civil Disobedience Movement

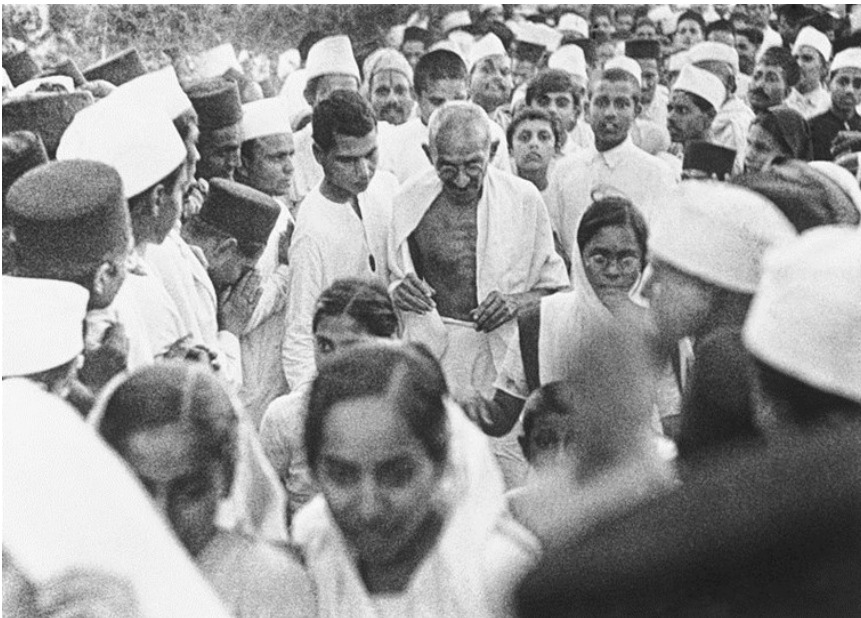
In 1930, Gandhi launched a demonstration against the salt tax. Salt production and distribution in India was a profitable monopoly of the British Raj.

Indians were forced to buy expensive and heavily taxed salt as, by law, they were not allowed to produce it. Gandhi decided to march from Sabarmati, near Ahmedabad to Dandi on the Arabian Sea coast, where he would produce salt. He started the march on 12 March with a few dozen followers. The group stopped in many villages on the route and people gathered to hear Gandhi speak against the unfairness of the tax. Hundreds more joined the core group of followers as they reached the sea on 5 April after a journey of 240 miles (385 km). The following day, Gandhi and his followers picked up handfuls of salt along the shore, technically producing salt and therefore breaking the law. The movement spread and salt laws were challenged in other parts of the country. Salt became the emblem of people's defiance as the Civil Disobedience Movement continued the unfinished work of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

The Quit India Movement

On 8 August 1942, at the All-India Congress Committee session in Bombay, Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement calling for an orderly British withdrawal from India.

The following day, Gandhi, Nehru and all members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested. This led to mass protests and demonstrations throughout the country. But the movement had poor coordination and no distinct plan of action and the British acted quickly to crush it. Thousands of people were arrested and jailed and many civilians were killed in violent clashes with the police and the army. Despite its weaknesses, the Quit India Movement is considered significant because it was during this phase that the British government recognised that they would not be able to govern India successfully in the long run, and the demand for independence could no longer be ignored.



Gandhi and followers during the Salt March, 1930

A two state solution

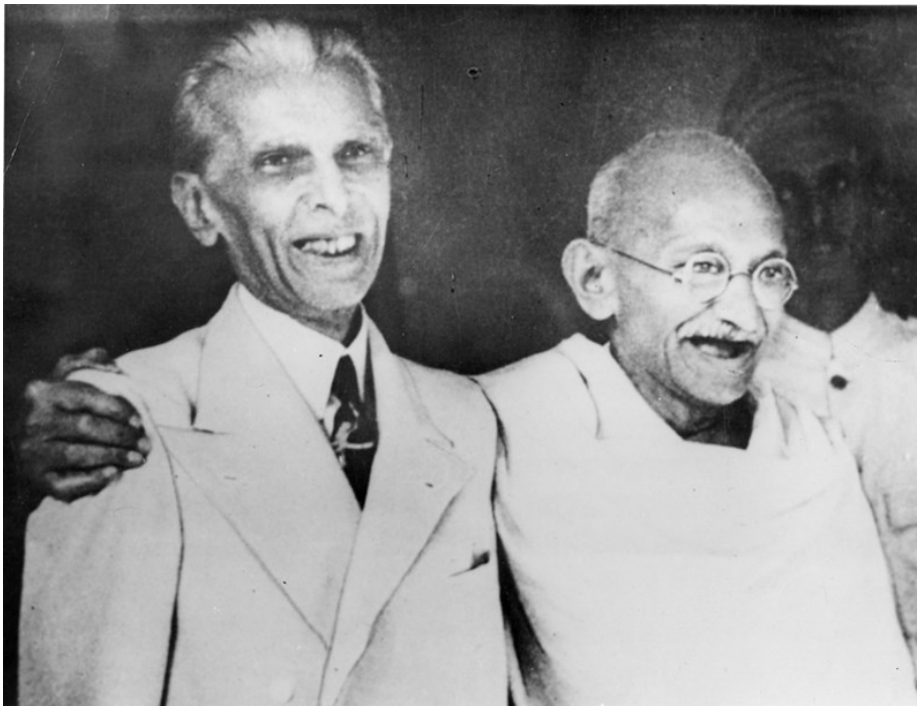
The partition of British India was conceived on the basis of the contested two nation theory. This theory was championed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah who maintained that the Muslims of the subcontinent needed their own state. Founded in 1906, the All India Muslim League protected the rights of Indian Muslims and adopted self-government for India as its goal in 1913. For almost three decades, the League stood for Hindu-Muslim unity in a united and independent India. But in March 1940, with the Lahore Resolution, later known as the Pakistan Resolution, the League called for the establishment of a separate homeland for the Muslims of British India. In 1944, Gandhi and Jinnah met for talks on the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, but these ended in failure. Gandhi did not believe in the two nation theory and opposed the division of India all along.

Impact and aftermath of partition

After the Second World War, Britain no longer had the capacity to control the subcontinent, but its exit from India was hurried and improvised. The Indian Independence Act was passed in July 1947 and ordered that India be divided within less than one month.

Two Boundary Commissions worked hastily to divide Punjab and Bengal in such a way as to leave the largest number of Muslims to the west of the former's new boundary and to the east of the latter's. On 15 August 1947, the people of these regions did not know to which side of the border they belonged. On 17 August, the Radcliffe Line was published with details of the boundary demarcation. As soon as the borders were known, an estimated ten million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs trekked from their homes on one side of the new borders to what they thought would be a safe place on the other side. It is thought that as many as one million people were killed in the outbreaks of sectarian violence that ensued. The carnage was especially terrifying in Punjab and Bengal, the two regions directly affected by the Radcliffe Line.

The historiography of India's independence is divided between various narratives that emphasise different historical aspects: the impact of World War Two, the internal dynamics within the British and Indian ruling elites, Indian resistance and freedom-fighting, or Jinnah's effort to secure a Muslim homeland. In the last 70 years, the debate has been fierce, and the history of Partition now boasts the most varied literature of any event in Asian history.



Jinnah and Gandhi in Bombay, 1944



A train crammed with refugees leaves for Pakistan from the border city of Amritsar in 1947

Events

Cultural and community events are taking place throughout the UK to celebrate the 70th anniversary of India's Independence. These include:

- **UK–India Year of Culture 2017**, a year-long programme of events organised by The British Council, the Indian High Commission and the UK government to celebrate the close ties between the two nations since India's independence.
- **India on film: celebrating the diversity of Indian filmmaking and films about India**, the British Film Institute explores the diversity of Indian filmmaking, from Bollywood to Tollywood. From April to December.
- **Independence Gala**, dance and music from India and the UK at the Royal Festival Hall. 4th October.
- **Festival of Independence**, theatre, music, poetry, comedy, and dance at the Shakespeare's Globe to illustrate the fight for personal, political and artistic freedom. From June to September.
- **Darbar Festival 2017**, current classical Indian music and dance at the Southbank Centre, the Barbican Centre and Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. From September to November.

- **At the heart of the nation: India in Britain: a photographic exhibition**, led by the Open University, in collaboration with the Indian High Commission. It will be showcased around the United Kingdom, including in London and Edinburgh from August to December.
- **India Unboxed**, a programme of exhibitions, events, discussions, and installations at the University of Cambridge Museums and Botanic Garden. From February to October.
- **Illuminating India**, a season of exhibitions and events at the Science Museum to celebrate India's contribution to science, technology, and mathematics. From October 2017 to March 2018.
- **Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo**, this August, the festival will pay tribute to Bollywood musicals, and will host some of the best military bands in India.
- **India's independence tour**, a guided tour of the National Army Museum galleries, exploring British-Indian relations. On 4, 18 and 25 August.