

## **The Partition of India and Pakistan, 1947**

Following the end of the British rule over India, the year 1947 saw the division of British India into two self-governing countries, namely India and Pakistan. Eventually known as the Partition of India, this split was deeply rooted in the religious tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the region. As a consequence, India became a predominantly Hindu country, while Pakistan became predominantly Muslim.

### **GREAT DIVIDE**

In 1945, following the end of the Second World War and the election of Great Britain's Labor Party, British and Indian leaders resumed talks on independence.

The leaders of the Indian National Congress, along with Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, campaigned for a non-religious country that aims to guarantee the rights of all Indians, whether Hindus or Muslims, through constitutional protection and democratic practice.

However, the Muslim League, led by its spokesperson Muhammad Ali Jinnah, pushed for a partition and an independent Pakistan. Both nations gained independence from the British Empire on 15 August 1947.

This brought an end to 300 years of British rule, and with the drawing of new borders through parts of India, the new nation of Pakistan was created. While the creation of the two new nations was a cause for celebration for many, violence continued after the Partition of India. More than a million people were killed and some 14 million displaced from their homes.

It should have been the dawn of a proud new nation, but the first days of India's independence were among the darkest in its history. The rush to split the country into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan left millions stranded on the wrong side of the new border and this initiated the largest migration in history. Nearly 14 million refugees fled their homes as entire villages were killed.

To set itself apart from India, Pakistan — the world's largest Muslim nation in 1947 — changed its time zone with a 30-minute difference. Before the separation, India was composed of about 66 per cent Hindu and 24 per cent Muslim.

### **EAST AND WEST PAKISTAN**

During the campaign for India's partition, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League originally desired the entire Bengal province, but later settled for an independent Pakistan, including East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh).

Pakistan was divided into two territories: East and West Pakistan. Separated by more than 1,600 kilometres, the two nations had language differences brought about by diverse ethnicities and traditions, even though they shared common religious roots.

### **RESULTS OF THE PARTITION**

One of the most enduring outcomes of the Indian partition was its record-breaking human migration. About 12 to 15 million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs needed to cross borders to live among people of the same religious orientation. Other accounts estimated that the partition resulted in 24 million refugees.

Mahatma Gandhi, who rejected the Indian division and campaigned to end the hatred among Hindus and Muslims, was also killed by a Hindu extremist five months after the partition had been declared.

**Read the biography of Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi.**

### **Questions**

1. What was the root cause of violence before and after the Partition?
2. Who pushed for a partition?
3. Who was against the Partition? What did they want?
4. Why was there so much migration?
5. Imagine having to migrate from India to Pakistan on foot with just the possessions you could carry. What were the consequences for many?
6. The Muslim League originally wanted all of Bengal, (East India), but finally settled for just the Eastern section of Bengal. What is this country called today?
7. What were the main cultural differences between East and West Pakistan?
8. Why is Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi famous? What was his role in trying to solve the problems at the time of the Partition? What action did he take?
9. Draw a map showing India and Pakistan after the Partition.