

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the problems resulting from partition?
- What challenges did independent India face and how did it respond?
- What challenges did independent Pakistan face and how did it respond?

## Overview

- After independence, violence between Hindus and Muslims led to the flight of fifteen million refugees across the borders between the new states.
- India and Pakistan went to war over the state of Kashmir, which was eventually partitioned between them by the United Nations.
- Independent India faced several challenges that threatened its survival as a secular democracy, including political extremism, language divisions, communalism and Sikh separatism.
- The new government implemented policies to promote industrialisation, institute land reform, deal with rural poverty and increase food production.
- Social challenges facing the government were the position of women, inequalities resulting from the caste system, high rates of illiteracy, inadequate health services and high population growth rates.
- Pakistan faced severe problems as a result of partition, with serious economic problems, political inexperience and disputes over assets with India.
- Internal tensions in Pakistan resulted in the secession of East Pakistan as the independent state of Bangladesh.
- Pakistan struggled to establish a strong tradition of democratic government, with the army frequently intervening to establish military rule.
- The dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir resulted in three wars and ongoing tensions in the region.
- As an ally of the United States, Pakistan was significantly affected by the politics of the Cold War, which had a destabilising effect militarily, politically and economically.

## TIMELINE

- 1947** India and Pakistan become independent; refugee crisis in Punjab; war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.
- 1948** Assassination of Gandhi; death of Jinnah.
- 1949** UN arranges ceasefire in Kashmir.
- 1950** India's first constitution ratified.
- 1964** Death of Nehru.
- 1965** War between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.
- 1971** East Pakistan becomes Bangladesh.
- 1984** Assassination of Indira Gandhi sparks anti-Sikh attacks.
- 1992** Hindu extremists destroy Ayodhya mosque.
- 1998** Hindu nationalist BJP comes to power in India; India and Pakistan become nuclear powers.
- 1999** War between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.
- 2001** US-led invasion of Afghanistan – start of 'War on Terror'.



## Theory of Knowledge

Historical interpretation: Some historians think that the reality of the partition of India cannot be understood by simply examining the political events that led up to it or that followed it.

They believe that this approach omits the 'human dimension', or the 'history from below' focus. Urvashi Butalia has constructed a history of partition based entirely on interviews with people who actually experienced it, called *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using oral evidence in history?

## 3.9 What were the problems resulting from partition?

Partition created immense problems for the two newly independent states. The two areas where partition was most complex were in the provinces of Punjab in the west and Bengal in the east. Both had mixed populations, so it had been decided to divide each of them between India and Pakistan.



**Figure 3.8** A convoy of refugees trying to reach East Punjab in 1947; partition led to a desperate migration of people anxious not to be caught on the wrong side of the border

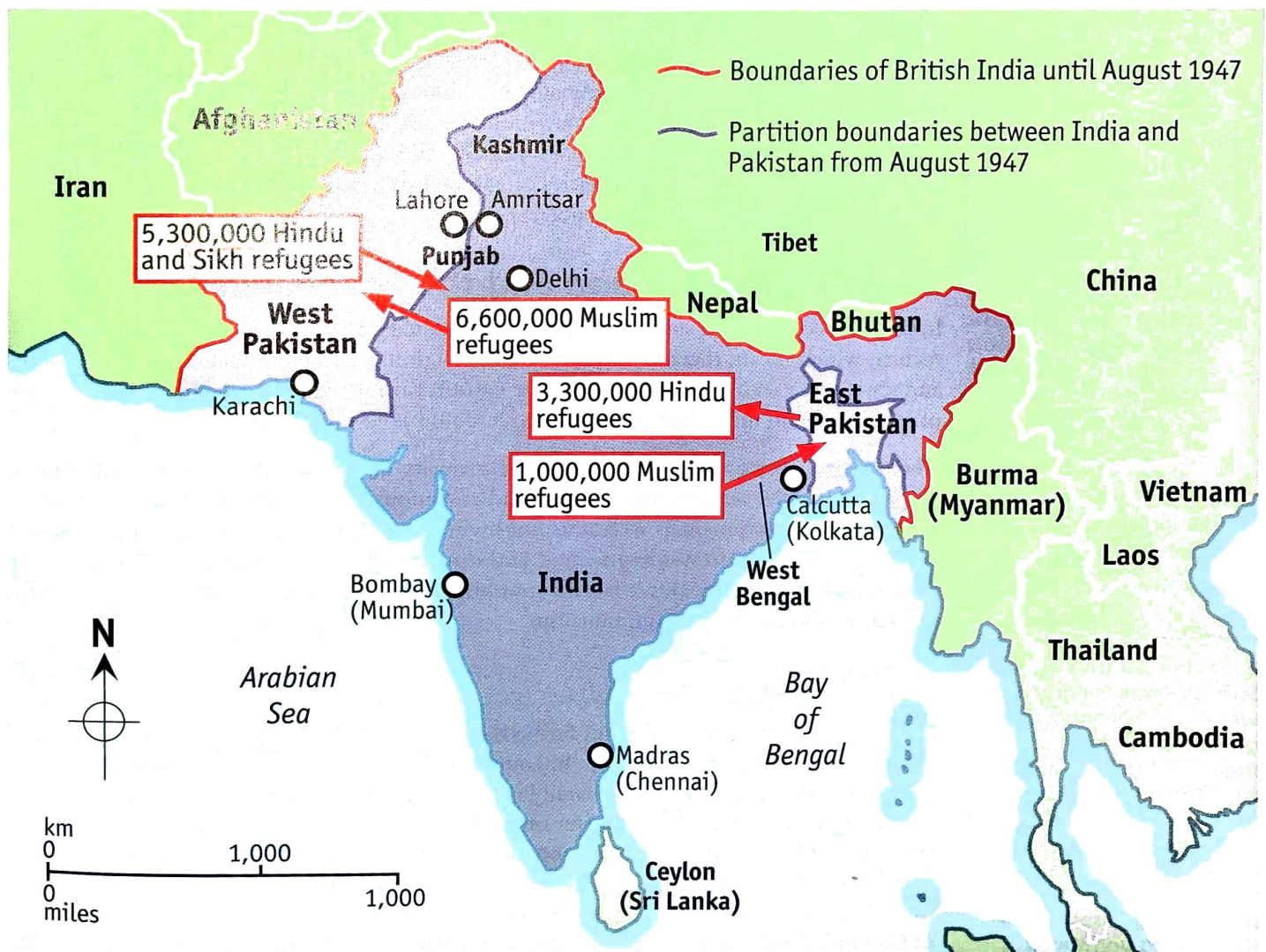


Matters were further complicated by the fact that the new borders dividing these provinces were announced only a few days after independence. Millions of Hindus and Muslims found themselves on the wrong side of the border and tried desperately to get to safety. About fifteen million people abandoned their homes and belongings in a panic-stricken scramble to get to the other side.

The situation in Punjab was also complicated by the presence of the Sikhs, who were scattered throughout the province. Their demands for their own state had been ignored, and they feared that the partition of the province would leave their community powerless and split between two states. When the border was finally announced, they streamed eastwards out of West Punjab, along with millions of Hindus. This added to the violence. At the same time, millions of Muslims were moving westwards towards the border of Pakistan. Law and order broke down entirely, and up to a million people were killed in communal attacks. As a result of this mass migration, East Punjab ended up with a population that was 60 per cent Hindu and 35 per cent Sikh, while the population of West Punjab was almost totally Muslim. This process was similar to the **ethnic cleansing** that has occurred in more recent times.

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**Ethnic cleansing:** the expulsion of a population from a certain area, or the forced displacement of an ethnic or religious minority. The term was widely used to refer to events in the civil wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s.



**Figure 3.9** Map of the subcontinent after independence, showing the flow of refugees



The province of Bengal was also partitioned and Hindu refugees fled from East Pakistan into West Bengal, with Muslim refugees moving in the opposite direction. However, the migration in Bengal was a more gradual process and not accompanied by as much violence and death as in Punjab.

By the end of 1947, the new governments were able to contain the violence and restore order and control. Despite the mass migration, about forty million Muslims remained in India, and several million Hindus in Pakistan. The resettlement of refugees was a huge financial burden for the new states, which also had to manage the economic consequences of the abrupt partition on existing patterns of communication, infrastructure, agriculture, irrigation and trade.

## 3.10 What challenges did independent India face and how did it respond?

After independence, India was dominated by the figure of its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who led the country until his death in 1964. During this period India emerged as a stable democracy – a notable achievement given the large size of the country and its population, the legacies of colonial rule and the difficulties encountered during the progress towards independence.

### The new constitution and the first election

India's first constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950. The constitution was secular, which meant there was to be no state religion, a complete separation of religion and state, and a secular school system. The constitution recognised equality and freedom of religion for all individuals, and any citizen could hold public office.

The Congress Party won an overwhelming majority in the first election in 1952, gaining 75 per cent of the seats in parliament. It had enormous prestige as the leader and heir of the nationalist movement as well as its links with Gandhi. Congress remained in power because the opposition was fragmented, and it managed to win successive elections during Nehru's lifetime. But it faced continuing problems relating to political extremism, separatist movements and communalism.

**Fact:** The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was an openly anti-Muslim group with a vision of India as a land of – and for – Hindus. Its members portrayed Muslims as a hostile and alien element in Indian society. Claiming to be a cultural not a political organisation, the RSS formed uniformed paramilitary cells.

### Political extremism

One of the most urgent challenges facing the new government was political extremism and right-wing Hindu nationalism. In January 1948, less than six months after independence, Gandhi was assassinated by a young Hindu extremist. His assassin was Nathuram Godse, an active supporter of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist group, opposed to the creation of a secular state in India. The RSS had promoted a campaign of hatred against Gandhi, accusing him of being a traitor because of his willingness to negotiate with the Muslim community. The shock of Gandhi's death strengthened the hand of secularists in the government, and helped to calm communal tensions within the new Indian state.





**Figure 3.10** Mourners surround the body of Mohandas Gandhi as it lies in state at his funeral in 1948

## Sikh separatism

The Sikhs made up a distinctive religious group, numbering about ten million, with their own history, culture and identity, as well as their own language, Punjabi. Many of them resented the fact that, while Hindus and Muslims had been accommodated in the partition plan, Sikh demands for their own state were ignored. When partition came, millions of them left their farms and villages in West Punjab and went to India as refugees. By 1951, they formed a third of the population of Indian Punjab, and held prominent positions in politics, business and the army. The main Sikh political party was the Akali Dal, which wanted more control for the Sikhs in Punjab. Some even wanted an independent Sikh state, to be called Khalistan.

When the Akali Dal held mass demonstrations in 1955, the Indian government ordered the army to invade the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs' most sacred holy place, which the government believed was the centre of the protests. In 1965, the Indian government finally agreed to create a smaller Punjab state with a Sikh majority, after the Sikh leader Fateh Singh threatened to fast to death unless the government recognised Sikh demands. Punjab was split into a new state called Haryana, which was mainly Hindu, and a smaller Punjab, where Sikhs formed the majority. The position of the Sikhs, however, remained unresolved, and led to problems for future Indian governments. In the 1980s, a violent campaign for the creation of a separate Sikh state led to the assassination of the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi.

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**Fact:** Some historians and politicians incorrectly refer to India as a 'Hindu state'. In fact, India is a secular state. After partition, forty million Muslims remained in India, compared to sixty million in Pakistan. According to the 2001 census, although the population is more than 80 per cent Hindu, there are sizeable religious minorities in India, including 138 million Muslims, 24 million Christians and 19 million Sikhs.

**Fact:** Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi (prime minister 1966–77 and 1980–4), was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards after she had ordered troops to storm the Golden Temple at Amritsar to arrest the leader of a militant Sikh separatist group. Thousands were killed in the process. After her death, at least 2,000 Sikhs were murdered and many more made homeless in anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and elsewhere.



## Communalism and Hindu nationalism

The Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) was a Hindu nationalist party that challenged the secular nature of the Indian state. Most of its leaders were also members of the militaristic Hindu nationalist group RSS. The BJS promoted Hindu culture, religion and traditions and, using the slogan 'one country, one culture, one nation', attempted to unite all Hindus. The group treated India's Muslims with suspicion, questioning their loyalty to India. In the 1952 general election, the BJS won only 3 per cent of the vote, indicating that there was little support for a communalist Hindu party at that stage. According to historian V.P. Kanitkar, Mohandas Gandhi's assassination had discredited right-wing Hindu organisations, diminishing their political influence.

The BJS was later succeeded by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the main Hindu nationalist party. *Hindutwa*, or the promotion of Hindu values and the creation of a state modelled on Hindu beliefs and culture, emerged in the 1980s as a powerful force in Indian politics, as support for the BJP grew. The movement was stridently anti-Muslim, and triggered communal violence. In 1992, Hindu extremists demolished a mosque in Ayodhya, claiming that it was built on one of the holiest Hindu sites. This action started a wave of violence between Hindus and Muslims in which more than 3,000 people were killed. In the 1998 general election, the Congress Party suffered its worst-ever defeat when the BJP emerged as the largest single party and ruled India as part of a coalition. Although the BJP was defeated by Congress in the 2004 election, it emerged again as the strongest party in the 2014 elections.

### Historical debate:

Historians debate the reasons for the rise of Hindu nationalism. Thomas Blom Hansen sees it as a response to the economic pressures created by globalisation. Others, such as Bose, see it as a reaction against the political mobilisation of lower-caste parties.

**Fact:** When the BJP emerged as the strongest party in the 2014 elections, its leader, Narendra Modi, became prime minister. One of the issues which he had to face was a campaign led by Mohan Bhagwat, the leader of the RSS, for the forcible conversion of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism. Crises such as these threatened the tradition of secular democracy in India.

## Problems of consolidation

At the time of independence, there were 550 'princely states' that occupied about 40 per cent of British India, and their rulers had to decide which state to join. All except three of them voluntarily decided to join either India or Pakistan, in return for the right to retain some of their wealth and privileges. Two of the exceptions were Hyderabad and Junagadh, where Muslim princes ruled over large Hindu populations. Both were annexed to India by force, against the wishes of their Muslim rulers, in moves generally welcomed by their people. The third exception was Kashmir, a large state, strategically placed in the north-west and bordering both India and Pakistan. It had a Hindu prince ruling over a predominantly Muslim population. India and Pakistan fought a war for control of Kashmir between December 1947 and January 1949, before the United Nations arranged a ceasefire and divided Kashmir between the two. This result satisfied neither side, nor the people of Kashmir.

The consolidation of India was completed when small areas that had remained under colonial control were incorporated. France handed over Pondicherry and other small French enclaves in 1954, and when Portugal was reluctant to withdraw from Goa, the Indian army invaded and united it with the rest of India in 1961. The dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir remained unresolved.

## Economic challenges

The main economic challenges facing India were poverty, unemployment, landlessness and an unequal distribution of resources. The government aimed to address these problems by introducing a series of Five-Year Plans to promote economic growth. However, this was offset by high population growth rates. Efforts at land reform and rural development schemes had limited success in reducing inequality or poverty among



the millions of landless villagers. The Five-Year Plans were more successful in industry, however, and helped to promote growth. Much of the industrialisation was financed from abroad, but Nehru was careful to limit foreign influence and avoid the dangers of **neo-colonialism**, through high tariff barriers and government control of key industries.

The focus of economic policy from the late 1960s shifted from industry to agriculture in an attempt to make India self-sufficient in food production. This was the 'Green Revolution', which used high-yielding seed varieties, irrigation schemes and chemical fertilisers to increase agricultural output by impressive amounts. However, it intensified regional inequalities as well as social divisions. Certain regions were not suited to the new methods of agriculture, and wealthier farmers, with access to capital, larger farms and entrepreneurial skills, were the ones who benefited. Government controls over the economy were relaxed in the 1980s, as India sought to become part of the world capitalist system. Despite initial problems, the Indian economy has grown at an exponential rate since the 1990s, and India is fast becoming one of the key players in the world economy.

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**Neo-colonialism:** literally, a new form of colonialism. It refers to the economic control that industrialised countries and international companies have over developing countries. The term was first used by the Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah to refer to Africa's continuing economic dependence on Europe.



**Figure 3.11** Villagers in India study by the light of lanterns at a night school in 1953

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**Fact:** India is referred to as one of the BRICS countries, an acronym that covers the rapidly emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Some economists believe that these nations have the potential to form a powerful economic bloc that could be wealthier than the current dominant economic powers by the middle of the 21st century.



## Social challenges

With India's low literacy rate of 16 per cent, one of the biggest challenges was improving the state of education. Efforts to increase the number of children attending school had some success, but the aim of compulsory education for all was not achieved. However, many new universities, institutes of technology and higher research establishments were established, with an emphasis on science and technology, to support the economic goals of industrialisation and modernisation.

After independence, there were dramatic changes in the status of women. Despite strong opposition from Hindu traditionalists, new laws gave women equal rights with men in the inheritance and ownership of property, as well as greater rights in marriage. But although the legal position of women improved, it was very difficult to change traditional attitudes, especially in rural areas. There was an improvement in the number of girls attending school, although educational opportunities for girls in rural areas lagged far behind those for boys. Even decades later, the literacy rate for women in India was significantly lower than that for men.

Another social challenge was the caste system, especially the position of the Untouchables. The 1950 constitution specifically abolished this class and the practice of 'untouchability' was forbidden. Members of this caste were now free to use the same shops, schools and places of worship as any other citizen. Special government funding was set aside to give them access to land, housing, health care, education and legal aid.

However, the new laws and the special aid did not abolish social disadvantages and discrimination, and caste oppression was still common in rural areas, where acts of brutal violence sometimes occurred. In some cases these were caused by the resentment over the preferential treatment decreed by government policies.

In 1950, India had a population of 350 million, with an average life expectancy of thirty-two years. Millions of people died each year in epidemics of smallpox, plague, cholera and malaria. The government allocated funding to improve health services, train more doctors and nurses, and build hospitals and clinics. But this resulted in rising population growth rates, putting more pressure on land and resources. The government tried to control this by offering incentives for smaller families and promoting sterilisation programmes, to which there was considerable resistance. Between 1947 and 2010, the average life expectancy in India more than doubled to sixty-six years, and literacy rates improved dramatically, to 61 per cent. However, in the same time, the population tripled to nearly 1.2 billion people.

## Cultural challenges

One of the biggest cultural challenges facing India was the issue of language. There were many hundreds of languages in India, and part of the colonial legacy was English as the language of government, the law courts and of higher education, as well as that of the educated middle and upper classes. The most widely used language was Hindi, spoken in the north, but it was used by only half of the people in India. The constitution recognised fourteen major languages, and made Hindi and English the official languages. However, it also allowed the Indian parliament to alter state boundaries, and this opened the way for different language speakers to press for changes. The Teluga-speaking Andhras of southern India were the first to campaign for a state of their own. Violent riots took place after an Andhra leader fasted to death, following which the state of

### Theory of Knowledge

**History and ethics:**  
The policy of the Indian government towards the lower castes is a form of 'affirmative action'. What does this mean? How can a policy of affirmative action be justified? Does it conflict with the principle of equal opportunity?

### ACTIVITY

How successfully did India respond to the challenges that it faced?



Andhra Pradesh was created in 1953, in an area formerly part of the state of Tamil Nadu. At the same time, Tamil Nadu was recognised as a Tamil-speaking state. Protests over language also led to the division of the state of Bombay to satisfy the demands of Gujarati and Marathi speakers.

The constitution had made provision for the phasing out of English as an official language and for Hindi to take its place completely by 1965. Tamil-speakers in southern India protested violently against the use of Hindi, and several demonstrators burned themselves to death. As a result, English was retained as the language of communication between the different regions. The continued use of English perpetuated a further division in Indian society, between the educated 5 per cent who spoke it and the rest of the population.

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### 3.11 What challenges did independent Pakistan face and how did it respond?

Pakistan did not make the transition to independence as smoothly as India. The problems facing the new Muslim state included the impact of partition, military dominance in politics, the dispute over Kashmir and the impact of the Cold War.

#### The legacies of partition

##### Economic and social challenges

At the time of partition, more than 90 per cent of industries in the region were in India, as well as most of the railways and hydroelectric plants. The large cities of South Asia – Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta – were all in India. Lahore was the only city of economic and cultural significance in Pakistan. Pakistan's economy was mainly agricultural, there were few exports and most people were poor farmers.

Both countries faced the challenge of settling millions of refugees, but for Pakistan it was particularly difficult, because the refugees formed a larger percentage of the population than they did in India. In addition, many of those coming into Pakistan were unskilled rural labourers, while many who fled from Pakistan to India were professionals, skilled workers and traders. This contributed to a shortage of skills to staff the new administration.

Although the majority of the population shared a common religion, Islam, there were vast linguistic and cultural differences, not only between the people of East and West Pakistan, but also within West Pakistan, where the people of the northern frontier areas bordering on Afghanistan were accustomed to a greater degree of autonomy.

##### Disputes over assets

There were bitter disputes over assets and territory between India and Pakistan. As a result of its size and geographical position, India inherited most of the administrative



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## India and Pakistan

### QUESTION

Why were some of the challenges facing Pakistan more complex than those facing India?

### ACTIVITY

Historians Talbot and Singh believe that the break-up of Pakistan, and the creation of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971, proved that ethnicity was a more enduring bond than religion. What evidence could be used to support this argument? Work out a counter-argument to this view.

infrastructure of British India, whereas Pakistan had to build up its government structures from scratch. There was suspicion and resentment over the division of assets, including financial reserves and government property. Pakistan believed that the Indian government intended to undermine it right from the start, by denying it a rightful share of these assets. In the end Pakistan reluctantly accepted what it regarded as an unfair division. Although Pakistan covered 23 per cent of the land area of the subcontinent, it only received 17.5 per cent of the financial assets. India was reluctant to hand even these over, and only did so after a fast by Gandhi put pressure on it.

The Indian Army had been the basis of British control over India, and there were disagreements too over its division. Although an agreement was reached that Pakistan would receive one-third of the troops and military equipment, most of the military stores were in Indian territory, and the transfer was plagued with difficulties. The outbreak of fighting with India over Kashmir in 1947 underlined the vulnerability of Pakistan's position, and so, according to historians Talbot and Singh, its government started to use scarce resources to build up its military forces 'at the cost of dependence on foreign aid and economic and social development'.

There was also a sense of injustice over the territorial division of India. In Pakistani eyes, some strategically important regions with Muslim majorities had been given to India. Pakistan's determination to unite Kashmir under Pakistani control must be understood in the light of these circumstances.

### A divided state

Pakistan itself was divided into two parts, East and West Pakistan, separated by 1,500km (930 miles) of Indian territory. More than half of the Pakistani population lived in East Pakistan, an economically underdeveloped region with very high population densities, which was subject to natural disasters such as regular flooding.

The people of the two regions had little in common except their religion. The Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan had their own culture and history, and a strong sense of national identity. They resented the political and economic dominance of the Urdu-speaking people of the western regions. Bengalis were underrepresented in the armed forces and in the administration. To them it seemed as though East Pakistan was little more than a colony, providing tax revenues and foreign exchange from the export of jute for the benefit of West Pakistan. A Bengali party, the Awami League, wanted greater autonomy, but West Pakistan maintained control by arresting its leaders and crushing protests. In 1971, West Pakistani troops crushed an uprising demanding the secession of East Pakistan. As a result, about ten million refugees fled into India to escape the fighting. This prompted the Indian government to intervene. Indian troops crossed the border into East Pakistan, 93,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered unconditionally, and the people of East Pakistan declared their independence as the state of Bangladesh.

### Political challenges

Pakistan did not have the same continuity of leadership experienced by India after independence. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan and its first leader in 1947, died of tuberculosis a year later. His successor, Liaquat Ali Khan, was assassinated in 1951. His death was partly motivated by a religious backlash to his secular policies, and a reaction by extremists to a perceived weakness in his negotiations with Nehru over Kashmir.



Another advantage that India had was the long experience of Congress in building up structures of leadership in the nationalist movement. Many of these leaders took positions in government after independence. The Muslim League, however, did not have this experience. The heartland of support for the League had been in the province of Uttar Pradesh, which was now part of India. Muslims from this region had moved westwards as refugees to Pakistan, and once there they had to compete with local people for access to land and employment, which put them at a disadvantage.

There were also problems surrounding the adoption of a constitution. The first drafts were rejected by Bengalis as giving too much power to the central government, and by prominent Muslim leaders who felt that the drafts did not sufficiently incorporate the principles of Islam. A constitution was finally approved in 1956, but it did not provide a stable foundation for democracy. Two years later the constitution was suspended when the head of the armed forces, General Ayub Khan, took over the government in the first of several spells of military rule. The circumstances of Pakistan's beginnings as an independent state – its weak economy, the dispute over Kashmir and the belief that its borders were insecure in the face of a strong and hostile neighbour – put the military in a strong position. The army frequently justified its intervention in politics on the pretext of stamping out corruption. From the 1950s onwards there were several long periods of military rule, interspersed with interludes of weak civilian government.

The position of the military was strengthened by outside circumstances, such as the Cold War. Realising its important strategic position in relation to the Soviet Union, the US formed alliances with Pakistan and supplied it with substantial military and financial aid. This aid significantly strengthened the position of the military in Pakistan and contributed to the weakness of democracy. The government used the aid to create an army that it hoped would be strong enough to recover Kashmir, and also provide it with protection against perceived Indian aggression. Pakistan was also negatively affected by the 'War on Terror', when the US led an invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 after the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. This was to have a destabilising effect on Pakistan, militarily, politically and economically.

### The problem of Kashmir

When the United Nations divided Kashmir in 1949, a UN peacekeeping mission remained in Kashmir to monitor the border between the two. The issue proved to be more politically divisive in Pakistan than in India. Many Pakistanis firmly believed that all of Kashmir, with its predominantly Muslim population, rightfully belonged in Pakistan. However, Pakistan did not have the military might to seize the parts of this region occupied by India by force, and this failure proved to be a source of embarrassment to a succession of Pakistani governments, undermining their authority and credibility.

Since 1949, India and Pakistan have fought two more wars over Kashmir – in 1965 and 1999. As both states became nuclear powers in the 1990s, the ongoing conflict over Kashmir became one of grave concern to the international community. Since 1987, a Muslim separatist group has been fighting a campaign in the Indian part of Kashmir to try to force the Indian government to withdraw from Kashmir altogether. Pakistan has provided support and funding to the Kashmiri militants, a source of ongoing tensions with India.

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**Fact:** Pakistan's alliance with the West and the continuing presence of Western forces in Afghanistan intensified instability in the northern areas of Pakistan. Militant Islamist groups conducted campaigns of political violence and terror directed at government forces. Many civilians became victims of these attacks, including 132 students who were massacred by suicide killers at a school in Peshawar in December 2014.

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#### QUESTION

Why is the dispute over Kashmir so difficult to resolve?

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