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## INDIA FROM CROWN RULE TO REPUBLIC, 1945-1949: RECORDS OF THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT



Independent India's first years were marked with turbulent events - partition, a massive exchange of population with Pakistan, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947 and the integration of over 500 princely states to form a united nation. This collection identifies the key issues, individuals, and events in the history of the Subcontinent between 1945 and 1949, and places them in the context of the complex and dynamic regional strategic, political, and economic processes that have fashioned India in the postwar period.

**Date Range:** 1945-1949

**Content:** 53,824 images

**Source Library:** National Archives (U.S.)

### **Detailed Description:**

The numbers of British in India were small, yet they were able to rule two-thirds of the subcontinent directly and exercise considerable leverage over the princely states that accounted for the remaining one-third of the area. There were 674 of these states in 1900, with a population of 73 million. In general, the princely states were strong supporters of the British regime, and the Raj left them alone.

The first step toward Indian self-rule was the appointment of councilors to advise the British viceroy, in 1861; the first Indian was appointed in 1909. Provincial Councils with Indian members were also set up. The councilors' participation was subsequently widened into legislative councils. The British built a large British Indian Army, with the senior officers all British, and many of the troops from small minority groups such as Gurkhas from Nepal and Sikhs. The civil service was increasingly filled with natives at the lower levels, with the British holding the more senior positions.

From 1920 leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi began highly popular mass movements to campaign against the British Raj using largely peaceful methods. Some others adopted a militant approach that sought to overthrow British rule by armed struggle; revolutionary activities against the British rule took place throughout the Indian subcontinent. The Gandhi-

led independence movement opposed the British rule using non-violent methods like non-cooperation, civil disobedience and economic resistance.

Along with the desire for independence, tensions between Hindus and Muslims had also been developing over the years. Muslims had always been a minority within the subcontinent, and the prospect of an exclusively Hindu government made them wary of independence; they were as inclined to mistrust Hindu rule as they were to resist the British Raj, although Gandhi called for unity between the two groups in an astonishing display of leadership. The British, extremely weakened by World War II, promised that they would leave and participated in the formation of an interim government. The British Indian territories gained independence in 1947, after being partitioned into the Union of India and Dominion of Pakistan. Following the controversial division of pre-partition Punjab and Bengal, rioting broke out between Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims in these provinces and spread to several other parts of India, leaving some 500,000 dead. Also, this period saw one of the largest mass migrations ever recorded in modern history, with a total of 12 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims moving between the newly created nations of India and Pakistan.

On 3 June 1947, Viscount Louis Mountbatten, the last British Governor-General of India, announced the partitioning of British India into India and Pakistan. With the speedy passage through the British Parliament of the Indian Independence Act of 1947, at 11:57 on August 14, 1947 Pakistan was declared a separate nation, and at 12:02, just after midnight, on August 15, 1947, India also became an independent nation. Violent clashes between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims followed. Prime Minister Nehru and Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel invited Mountbatten to continue as Governor General of India. He was replaced in June 1948 by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari.

At the time of independence, British India consisted of 17 provinces and 562 princely states. The provinces were given to India or Pakistan, in some cases in particular - Punjab and Bengal - after being partitioned. The princes of the princely states, however, won the right to either remain independent or join either nation. Thus India's leaders faced the prospect of inheriting a nation fragmented between medieval-era kingdoms and provinces organized by colonial powers. Under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the new Government of India employed political negotiations backed with the option of military action to ensure the primacy of the Central government and of the Constitution then being drafted. The Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of India, drafted by a committee headed by B. R. Ambedkar, on November 26, 1949. India became a federal, democratic republic after its constitution came into effect on January 26, 1950. Rajendra Prasad became the first President of India, taking over from Governor General Rajgopalachari.

Throughout this period an estimated 3.5 million Hindus and Sikhs living in West Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Baluchistan, East Bengal and Sind migrated to India. Communal violence killed an estimated one million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, and gravely destabilized both Dominions along their Punjab and Bengal boundaries, and the cities of Calcutta, Delhi and Lahore. The violence was stopped by early September 1947 owing to the cooperative efforts of both Indian and Pakistani leaders, and especially due to the

efforts of Mohandas Gandhi, the leader of the Indian freedom struggle, who undertook a "fast-unto-death" in Calcutta and later in Delhi to calm people and emphasize peace despite the threat to his life. Both Governments constructed large relief camps for incoming and leaving refugees, and the Indian Army was mobilized to provide humanitarian assistance on a massive scale.

The assassination of Mohandas Gandhi on January 30, 1948 was carried out by Nathuram Vinayak Godse, a Hindu extremist affiliated with the nationalist movement, which held him responsible for partition and charged that Mohandas Gandhi was appeasing Muslims. More than one million people flooded the streets of Delhi to follow the procession to cremation grounds and pay their last respects.

In 1949, India recorded close to 1 million Hindu refugees flooding into West Bengal and other states from East Pakistan, owing to communal violence, intimidation and repression from Muslim authorities. The plight of the refugees outraged Hindus and Indian nationalists, and the refugee population drained the resources of Indian states, which were unable to absorb them. While not ruling out war, Prime Minister Nehru and Sardar Patel invited Liaquat Ali Khan for talks in Delhi. Although many Indians termed this appeasement, Nehru signed a pact with Liaquat Ali Khan that pledged both nations to the protection of minorities and creation of minority commissions. Although opposed to the principle, Patel decided to back this Pact for the sake of peace, and played a critical role in garnering support from West Bengal and across India, and enforcing the provisions of the Pact. Khan and Nehru also signed a trade agreement, and committed to resolving bilateral disputes through peaceful means. Steadily, hundreds of thousands of Hindus returned to East Pakistan, but the thaw in relations did not last long, primarily owing to the Kashmir dispute.

This collection of U.S. State Department Central Classified Files relating to the internal affairs of India and U.S. relations with India, contain a wide range of materials, including:

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- interviews and minutes of meetings with foreign government officials
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On these subjects and many more, the State Department Central Classified Files offer authoritative, in-depth, and timely documentation and analysis that cannot be matched.

*Source Note: RG 59, Records of the Department of State, Central Files, India, 1945-1949, Decimal numbers 645, 745, 845 and 711.45. Includes all documents previously segregated due to security classification that have been interfiled by the National Archives.*