

# How did India achieve independence in 1947?

History

Lesson 4 of 4 lessons

## Lesson 4: Freedom and division

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# India: land of many different people

India was a land of many languages and religions. For example, most Indians were Hindu, but large numbers were Muslim or Sikh. There were Christians and Parsis too.

**Congress** had argued for Indian independence for many years. Congress was mainly Hindu Indians. But Congress was led by Gandhi (a Hindu) who wanted all Indians to unite. An organisation called the **Muslim League** was formed, which tried to guarantee the rights of Muslim Indians. Sometimes the Muslim League cooperated with Congress. At other times they disagreed. For example, the groups cooperated in their shared aim of getting Britain to "Quit India."

Congress started to oppose supporting World War Two, since Gandhi had been arrested and imprisoned. The Muslim League supported World War Two as a way of gaining British support for a separate Muslim country after the War. Gandhi wanted India united - all religions and languages - as one nation.



# The idea of Partition

The majority of Indians - Hindu and Muslim - did not want to be ruled by the British and wanted to govern themselves. Indians, like Vishnu's family, were angry about the rules made by the British and the control of India by the British army.

Before India gained independence from the British Empire, there was tension between Hindus and Muslims. The **viceroy** in India (the British ruler), held talks with Congress and the Muslim League to try to find a solution.

After the War, the idea grew for the newly independent India to be divided. **Partition**, as it was called, would mean two separate states - India and **Pakistan**. Most of the western and some eastern regions had a majority of Muslims living there. These Muslim regions would become Pakistan.

India was formed mostly of Hindu regions, with Muslims living in villages and towns across India.



# Partition agreed

Some Indians were furious. As independence neared, India headed towards civil war – Hindu versus Muslim. Gandhi begged Indians to unite, to come together in opposition to British rule. The Muslim League organised a “Direct Action Day” to argue for a Muslim homeland of Pakistan. The Direct Action Day had the unintentional result of the deaths of more than 4,000 in one city. In the week that followed, there was more violence which resulted in hundreds of deaths of Hindus and Muslims across the country.

India appeared to be tearing itself apart.

Meanwhile, a British judge was given the job of drawing a border between the new states of India and Pakistan. The judge was given 40 days to invent a new border. The new border was announced two days after India’s independence in August 1947.



# Vishnu's family divided

The new border between India and Pakistan put Sind in Pakistan. Vishnu's family in Sind were Hindu. Most Indians who lived in Sind were Hindu. Vishnu's family in Sind now lived in a separate Muslim-majority country from Vishnu who lived in Hindu-majority India. Vishnu's family were of the same religion, spoke the same language, but were now different nationalities. Many from Sind decided to leave Pakistan and move to India.

Hundreds of thousands of Muslim Indians decided to move to Pakistan. And so, only a few days after India was independent, there were thousands of **refugees**, leaving their homes in search of a new life in a new country.



# Glossary

**Muslim League:** A group of Muslim Indians who supported independence but also wanted Muslim rights to be protected in a Hindu-majority India.

**Viceroy:** The British ruler of India. He represented the King.

**Partition:** The idea of separating India into two states, Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India.

**Pakistan:** The name given to the new Muslim-majority country that separated from India.

**Refugees:** Men and women who leave their home, usually through war or violence, and have nowhere to live.

