

Modern India

With the granting of its independence on August 15, 1947, India became the world's largest democracy. As the long-awaited hour of India's freedom approached, Jawaharlal Nehru, the independent nation's first prime minister, addressed the country's political leaders:

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Long years ago, we made a tryst [appointment] with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will wake to life and freedom.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, speech before the Constituent Assembly, August 14, 1947



Problems Faced After Independence

15th August 1947 marked the end of colonial rule in India and the country found itself standing on the threshold of a new era wherein the task was to build a strong nation. While India found itself independent from the British, it was still to find independence from social, economic and political problems that had started to become a rock in the way of its growth.

India face these major issues soon after independence:

- **The Refugee Problem:** The partition of India gave way to a refugee problem. By mid-1948 about 5.5 million non-Muslims had moved into India and a very large number of Muslims had left India for Pakistan. According to the Indian government, the non-Muslims left behind property worth 500 crores in West Pakistan whereas the Muslim losses in India are put to 100 crores.
- **Origin of the Kashmir Problem:** The Maharaja Hari Singh was a Hindu while 75% of the population was that of Muslims. Kashmir was strategically important for both India and Pakistan. The Maharaja feared democracy in India and communalism in Pakistan, thus hoping to stay independent.
- **Foundation of the Indian Democracy:** The first general election in India which was held in 1952 was a landmark event in the history of the state which marked the establishment of the Indian democracy. It was held over a period of 4 months from October 1951 to February 1952. Congress got more than 70% of the votes polled. The Constitution of India is the supreme law of India. The document lays down the framework demarcating fundamental political code, structure, procedures, powers, and duties of government institutions and sets out fundamental rights, directive principles, and the duties of citizens. It was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India in 1949 and became effective in 1950. The constitution replaced the Government of India Act, 1935 as the country's fundamental governing document, and the Dominion of India became the Republic of India. The constitution declares India a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic, assuring its citizens justice, equality and liberty, and endeavors to promote fraternity. The words "secular" and "socialist" were added to the preamble in 1976 during the emergency.
- **Linguistic Reorganization:** Boundaries of the British Indian provinces had been drawn and redrawn in a haphazard manner without any thought to cultural and linguistic cohesion. Most provinces were multilingual and multicultural and after independence, many former princely states were absorbed into them. There was a demand for linguistically homogeneous provinces.

Please turn over.

Nehru Leads India Nehru served as India's leader for its first 17 years of independence. He had been one of Gandhi's most devoted followers. Educated in Britain, Nehru won popularity among all groups in India. He emphasized democracy, unity, and economic modernization.

Nehru used his leadership to move India forward. He led other newly independent nations of the world in forming an alliance of countries that were neutral in the Cold War conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union. On the home front, Nehru called for a reorganization of the states by language. He also pushed for industrialization and sponsored social reforms. He tried to elevate the status of the lower castes, or those at the bottom of society, and help women gain the rights promised by the constitution.

Troubled Times Nehru died in 1964. His death left the Congress Party with no leader strong enough to hold together the many political factions that had emerged with India's independence. Then, in 1966, Nehru's daughter, [Indira Gandhi](#), was chosen prime minister. After a short spell out of office, she was reelected in 1980.

Although she ruled capably, Gandhi faced many challenges, including the growing threat from Sikh extremists who themselves wanted an independent state. The Golden Temple at Amritsar stood as the religious center for the Sikhs. From there, Sikh nationalists ventured out to attack symbols of Indian authority. In June 1984, Indian army troops overran the Golden Temple. They killed about 500 Sikhs and destroyed sacred property. In retaliation, Sikh bodyguards assigned to Indira Gandhi gunned her down. This violent act set off another murderous frenzy, causing the deaths of thousands of Sikhs.