

[Modern humans](#) arrived on the [Indian subcontinent](#) from Africa no later than 55,000 years ago.^{[27][28][29]} Their long occupation, initially in varying forms of isolation as hunter-gatherers, has made the region highly diverse, second only to Africa in human [genetic diversity](#).^[30] [Settled life](#) emerged on the subcontinent in the western margins of the [Indus river basin](#) 9,000 years ago, evolving gradually into the [Indus Valley civilisation](#) of the third millennium BCE.^[31] By 1200 BCE, an [archaic form](#) of [Sanskrit](#), an [Indo-European language](#), had [diffused](#) into India from the northwest,^{[32][33]} [unfolding](#) as the language of the [Rigveda](#), and recording the dawning of [Hinduism](#) in India-IND.^[34] The [Dravidian languages](#) of India were supplanted in the northern and western regions.^[35] By 400 BCE, [stratification](#) and [exclusion](#) by [caste](#) had emerged within Hinduism,^[36] and [Buddhism](#) and [Jainism](#) had arisen, proclaiming [social orders](#) unlinked to heredity.^[37] Early political consolidations gave rise to the loose-knit [Maurya](#) and [Gupta Empires](#) based in the [Ganges Basin](#).^[38] Their collective [era](#) was suffused with wide-ranging creativity,^[39] but also marked by the declining status of women,^[40] and the incorporation of [untouchability](#) into an organised system of belief.^{[41][42]} In [South India](#), the [Middle kingdoms](#) exported Dravidian-languages scripts and religious cultures to the kingdoms of [Southeast Asia](#).^[42]

In the early medieval era, [Christianity](#), [Islam](#), [Judaism](#), and [Zoroastrianism](#) became established on India's southern and western coasts.^[43] Muslim armies from [Central Asia](#) intermittently overran India's northern plains,^[44] eventually founding the [Delhi Sultanate](#), and drawing northern India into the cosmopolitan [networks of medieval Islam](#).^[45] In the 15th century, the [Vijayanagara Empire](#) created a long-lasting composite Hindu culture in south India.^[46] In the [Punjab](#), [Sikhism](#) emerged, rejecting institutionalised religion.^[47] The [Mughal Empire](#), in 1526, ushered in two centuries of relative peace,^[48] leaving a legacy of luminous architecture.^[49] Gradually expanding [rule of the British East India Company](#) followed, turning India into a colonial economy, but also consolidating its [sovereignty](#).^[50] [British Crown rule](#) began in 1858. The rights promised to Indians were granted slowly,^{[51][52]} but [technological changes](#) were introduced, and ideas of education, modernity and the public life took root.^[53] A pioneering and influential nationalist movement emerged, which was noted for nonviolent resistance and became the major factor in ending British rule.^{[54][55]} In 1947 the British Indian Empire was [partitioned](#) into two independent [dominions](#),^{[56][57][58][59]} a Hindu-majority [Dominion of India](#) and a Muslim-majority [Dominion of Pakistan](#), amid large-scale loss of life and an unprecedented migration.^[60]