

From Empire to Commonwealth

Keywords:

Post-colonialism: term first used in the middle of the 20th century; refers to the time after the British had left the colonies, i.e. after their formal rule over the colonies had come to an end. Political independence did not necessarily lead to economic independence. The withdrawal of the British often resulted in problems for the ex-colonies, e.g. in difficulties in setting up a functioning government which guaranteed the people the freedom they dreamed of.

The Commonwealth: a group of 52 states; many former British colonies joined at the end of the decolonization process; aims at racial equality and national sovereignty. The British Queen is the head of the Commonwealth.

- At the **beginning of the 17th century** Britain started to expand its empire across the globe.
- The colonizers had a huge impact on the colonies and their people, bringing new traditions, values and beliefs with them.

- **After the 2nd World War** the British Empire changed rapidly.
- Most British colonies became independent from Britain by 1970, but a large number of them stayed closely connected with their former colonizer by joining the Commonwealth.

- While the British ruled the colonies, their culture, values, traditions and language were regarded as superior to those of the colonized.
- This often caused a feeling of displacement and rootlessness on the part of the colonized, as they had grown up being constantly reminded of their inferiority.
- Now, after independence, they faced the difficult task of recreating their own identity, bridging the gap between their country's native traditions and values and British ones.

- As people from member countries of the Commonwealth were allowed to immigrate to Britain, lots of people did so in the second half of the 20th century.
- First they were welcomed, as workers were needed after the 2nd World War, but in the 1970s, when more and more workers faced unemployment because of the economic crisis, immigration came to be seen more critically.

- Much **post-colonial writing** – written both in the former colonies and in Britain – deals with the issue of being caught between two cultures or of trying to find one's identity.

The Raj

Keyword:

Raj: (Hindustani) = "reign"

The term refers to the time from 1858 to 1947 when the Indian subcontinent was ruled by the British.

- **British influence** in India started as early as the 16th century with the founding of the British East India Company.
- Because of its spices, cotton and tea, India was used as a trading colony.
- **1858:** The British Crown took over the areas ruled by the British East India Company, and in 1876 Queen Victoria became Empress of India.
- **August 15, 1947:** The Indian Empire was divided into the Union of India, with Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister, and the Dominion of Pakistan.
- The separate colony of Burma in the Eastern part of the Indian Empire, which had become an independent colony in 1937, gained its independence in 1948.

India and Pakistan

- **1947:** India and Pakistan were founded¹.
- The partition of the Indian Empire led to riots, and mass migration started, as the Union of India was predominantly Hindu, whereas the Dominion of Pakistan was Muslim.
- Many people feared persecution because of their religion and attempted to move to the other state. Millions of people became homeless and about half a million people were killed.
- India and Pakistan quarrelled over two regions in the northwest, Jammu and Kashmir, because both India and Pakistan claimed (and still claim) these areas.
- Up to 1846 both Jammu (predominantly Hindu) and Kashmir (predominantly Muslim) were controlled by Sikhs, but when the British fought them, they installed a Maharajah to control these areas.
- At the time of Independence there were more than 500 states ruled by local princes² who owed allegiance to Britain. The rulers of those states were asked to join either India or Pakistan.
- When **partition** came, the Maharajah of Jammu and Kashmir still had not decided which state to join. Although he later decided to join India, Jammu and Kashmir have remained a bone of contention between India and Pakistan.
 - The **Pakistani** position: They should join Pakistan, as the majority is Muslim.
 - The **Indian** position: They rightfully belong to India because the Maharajah finally decided to join India.

¹ In 1971 East Pakistan became Bangladesh.

² A princely state is controlled by an Indian ruler rather than directly by the British, but remains loyal to the British crown.

The still existing tension between India and Pakistan originated in the partition of the Indian Empire.

The role of women in India

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women." (Jawaharlal Nehru)

- The Constitution of India guarantees equal rights for both men and women. On its website the Indian Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation states that "(Fundamental) Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibit discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment."³
- In the past women have played an active role in various areas of life, e.g. Indira Gandhi (born 1917, assassinated 1984) as the second-longest serving Prime Minister of India (1966–1977 and 1980–1984). To date she has been the only female Prime Minister of India. No other country in the world has a higher number of female politicians.
- Despite the fact that women's rights are granted on paper, the reality often looks different:
 - Traditional views and customs still lead to discrimination and harassment of women. Although child marriage and dowries are prohibited by law, they are still practised in rural areas.
 - Women are often subject to various forms of discrimination and crime, such as rape, acid throwing and dowry deaths, where the bride is continually harassed by her husband and in-laws to ensure a higher dowry, and ultimately murdered or driven to commit suicide.
- As in many other countries all over the world, ultrasound scans are part of pre-natal care for a majority of pregnant women in India. Nevertheless, as a large number of female babies had been aborted in the past, revealing a baby's gender before birth became a punishable offence in India in 1994 under the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, which was amended in 2002.
- On August 4, 2009, the Parliament of India passed The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act⁴. Under this act, the education of any child between 6 and 14 years of age became a fundamental right. According to UNICEF, the youth (15 to 24 years of age) literacy rate in the years 2008 to 2012 was 88.4% for boys/young men and 74.4% for girls/young women⁵.

³ http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/man_and_women/Constitutional%20&%20Legal%20Rights.pdf (retrieved January 1, 2016)

⁴ http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/RTEAct.pdf (retrieved January 1, 2016)

⁵ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_statistics.html (retrieved January 1, 2016)

Economy

- With an economic growth rate of 7.46% (based on data provided by the International Monetary Fund⁶), India is currently the 8th largest economy in the world. It recently outperformed China as the world's fastest-growing economy.
- In 2015, the average annual income was about €1100, and almost 30% of the population lived below the poverty line of \$1 a day.
- The main drive for India's economic growth is the service sector, e.g. information technology and related services, telecommunications and financial services.
- Economic growth has detrimental effects on India's environment, as pollution of air and water, as well as the combustion of fossil fuels, has increased dramatically.

Glossary – India

adapt to sth.	sich an etw. anpassen
arranged marriage	eine arrangierte Ehe
be oppressed by someone	von jemandem unterdrückt werden
caste	Kaste
colonialism; colonizer; colonized	Kolonialismus; der Besiedler; kolonisiert
combustion	Verbrennung
compulsory education	Schulpflicht
dowry	Mitgift
empire	das Imperium
excluded (from)	(von) etw. ausgeschlossen
hostile	feindlich, feindselig, ablehnend
imperialism; imperialistic	Imperialismus; imperialistisch
indigenous	Einheimischer eines Landes
literacy rate	Alphabetisierungsrate
poverty line	Armutsgrenze
service sector	Dienstleistungssektor