

Lesson 4 Later History of South Asia

Lesson Summary

South Asia After the Guptas

After the Gupta empire, South Asia had many Hindu kingdoms and empires. South Asians continued to build great Hindu temples and beautiful sculptures. They also made advances in science and mathematics.

How Did Islam Arrive in South Asia?

In the 600s and 700s, Muslims conquered much of modern Afghanistan and Pakistan. Traders also brought Islam to South Asia. By the 1200s, Muslim invaders set up a new state. Called the Delhi sultanate, it grew to cover much of modern Pakistan and northern India. Hindu rulers still ruled in the south. Hindus and Muslims were rivals, though there was also cultural exchange.

The Mughal Period

In 1526, a Muslim from Central Asia named Babur overthrew the Delhi sultanate. He founded the Mughal empire. His grandson Akbar conquered much of South Asia. He became known as a tolerant leader. Aurangzeb, the next ruler, persecuted non-Muslims. His military campaigns weakened the empire.

The Mughal empire never conquered southern India. Beginning in the 1700s, Hindus in central India formed their own kingdoms.

During this time, the new religion of Sikhism emerged in a region in the north called the **Punjab**. The founder of Sikhism was a guru named Nanak. He taught that there was only one God and that all people are equal.

European Colonialism

During Mughal times, Europeans set up trading ports in South Asia. By the 1820s, the British East India Company had taken over most of India. In 1858, the British government took control of the Company's lands. South Asia then became part of the British empire. The region provided Britain with tea, coffee, grain, and cotton.

By the 1900s, Indians had started a movement to force Britain out of India. Mohandas Gandhi was its greatest leader. He used boycotts and marches to protest British rule. Gandhi called on Hindus and Muslims to unite as one nation. Other people wanted to divide South Asia along religious lines.

South Asia After Independence

Britain finally withdrew from South Asia in 1947. It divided the colony into India, where Hindus were the majority, and Pakistan, with a Muslim majority. Pakistan had two regions, one west of India and one to the east. After the British left, millions of Hindus and Sikhs moved from Pakistan to India. At the same time, millions of Muslims moved to Pakistan. The migration included violence and the breakup of families.

India's first prime minister was Jawaharlal Nehru. He did not ally India with either the United States or the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Later, India and Pakistan both developed nuclear weapons. Since the two countries were sometimes bitter rivals, many people worried about them having such powerful weapons.

The government of Pakistan was based in West Pakistan. People living in East Pakistan thought it treated them unfairly. When East Pakistan demanded independence, the government attacked. India helped East Pakistan gain independence in 1971. The new country took the name Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka saw conflict as well. Most people there are Buddhists who speak Sinhalese. A significant minority are Hindus who speak Tamil. Some of the minority began fighting for a separate state in 1983. The war did not end until 2009. About 70,000 people died in the fighting.

In the 1970s, a communist government seized control of Afghanistan. That action led to rebellions. The Soviet Union sent troops in to support the communists. The United States gave weapons to the rebels. The Soviet Union finally withdrew. Then a Muslim fundamentalist group called the Taliban imposed harsh rule in Afghanistan. The Taliban helped Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda terrorist group. After this group attacked the United States in 2001, the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan. They defeated the Taliban, but fighting continued years later.

Pakistan has struggled to build a stable government. It has seen conflict between Islamic fundamentalists and other Pakistanis. Because of a shared border with Afghanistan, the country has also become a refuge for Taliban fighters.