

# INDIAN GOVERNMENT

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## ANCIENT PERIOD

### Classical India/South Asia

**Overview** Of all the classical societies, India left the least clear mark in terms of government traditions and roles. There are several reasons for this: the huge subcontinent saw a variety of political structures during the classical period, with a great deal of local variation. Despite two major empires, a tradition of unified government was not established. Nor did Indian intellectuals devote a great deal of time to political issues – in contrast to both China and the Mediterranean – though there were some discussions. This does not mean that India was badly governed, and certainly the periods of great cultural creativity and expanding trade show that political conditions did not hold the civilization back in any systematic way. But the approach was distinctive. The subcontinent simply relied more heavily on social and cultural frameworks than on political ones.

**Context** Indian structures emerged gradually after about 800 BCE, including the elaboration of a priestly religion that ultimately developed into Hinduism. The subcontinent was dotted with small regional kingdoms and other states. The strong religious emphasis gave an unusually prominent place to the priestly Brahmin caste, which ultimately gained the highest social rank. This already suggests a level of interest in spiritual matters and ritual that might overshadow political focus, though the Brahmins did sometimes play a political role; and religious epics tended to sanction monarchy as the preferred political form. Great attention was devoted to the creation and elaboration of the signature caste system, as means of organizing social and assigning economic roles and rules for interaction. In a real sense, caste regulations (though supported by regional states in the north) did some of the work that legal codes and bureaucratic arrangements did in other societies, helping to explain, again, why political focus was somewhat diffuse.

**Political writings** Between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE, a major teacher and intellectual, Chanakya (often known as Kautilya\_) authored a basic political treatise, the *Arthashastra*. The work reflected political developments during India's first great empire, the Mauryan, and may have influenced imperial policy. The treatise paid great attention to monetary and fiscal policies, international relations, and war, and outlined the principal duties of a ruler. It may have built on earlier texts by various authors, suggesting the need to clarify political principles in India during a period of state formation. The treatise emphasized the importance of public works such as forts and irrigation systems, to help regions respond to disasters like famines and wars, and insisted on the fundamental importance of political knowledge. It assumed a monarchical government: the best king is a wise king, carefully educated to the duties of state. Officials must be chosen carefully, based on the king's personal knowledge of their integrity and moral character – this was not a formula for an elaborate bureaucracy. Rulers were urged to treat subjects kindly and tax sensibly, to win their favor; a considerable section was devoted to the role of the state in prosecuting crime. Frequent warfare was assumed, though peace preferred; a long section (reflecting conditions in the Mauryan empire) was devoted to spying. Overall, this was a major political text, influential at the time and affecting later authors. Sometimes compared to Machiavelli's work, because of the amount of attention to tactics for staying in power, it differed in emphasizing the

importance of overall welfare and prosperity. However, it was lost at the end of the classical period (rediscovered only in 1905), which limited its role as a durable guide in India's government history.

**Decentralization and variety** During long stretches of the classical period, the subcontinent was divided into a host of political entities, and it was never centralized entirely. Localism and regional diversity formed one of the governmental legacies of the classical period. Many of the smaller units were monarchies, which comported with the assumptions provided in most Hindu epics and also the major law code (the code of Manu) developed after 200 BCE (where the king was a key figure in the overall caste structure). (This was an influential code revolving around the caste system, rather than the legal activities of any particular state.) Monarchs and their staffs, including the military, were drawn largely from the *kshatriya* or warrior caste (which along with the priestly caste constituted about 20% of the population). The caste was responsible for military success but also good governance in times of peace. Initially, in fact, the caste was given top billing, but lost this position to the Brahmins as religion became more important – a revealing shift, in terms of government. Recent scholarship has made it clear that, amid varied regional jurisdictions, republican forms sometimes flourished as well – monarchy was not universal. Usually, these seem to have been governed by assemblies of warriors, but on occasion the merchant caste may have participated; and it is possible that participation even involved a somewhat democratic element (though among males of appropriate castes). This kind of alternative was most common in city-states, but occasionally showed up in larger regional agglomerations. In contrast to classical Greece, however, these alternatives were not given much attention in political theory.

**Imperial tradition** Classical India nurtured two periods of imperial rule, both rather brief and involving an uncertain legacy. The first, Mauryan, dynasty was the most impressive, forming partly in response to invasions by Alexander the Great's forces in the northwest. Launched around 322 BCE, it survived, though amid increasing decentralization, until about 185 BCE; at its height, it embraced the majority of the subcontinent and formed the largest unit ever developed before the British period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its extent helped solidify the caste system. This was a period of considerable prosperity. Mauryan emperors, though warrior-conquerors, devoted careful attention to administration, setting up a provincial structure that may have reflected Persian precedent. Each of four provinces had a royal administrator, assisted by a council. The government took responsibility for coinage. The taxation system was carefully defined and reasonably equitable. Mauryan rulers sponsored a major highway across much of the northern part of the empire, a boon to commerce aided as well by vigorous efforts to eliminate brigandage. The regime supported a large army and an extensive espionage system. It was also backed by a substantial bureaucracy, dealing with matters ranging from international relations to municipal hygiene. Under the last great Mauryan emperor, Ashoka, the regime turned away from war, after the ruler witnessed massive slaughter in a key battle, and began sponsoring Buddhist missionary efforts. But the Mauryans declined rather rapidly after Ashoka, and left little direct legacy. Their success in setting up effective local governments, particularly in the cities, with boards responsible for economic activities, weights and measures, hospitals and schools, even tourism, may help explain why Indian society continued to function reasonably well even without an overarching imperial structure.

**The Guptas** Much later and separately, a Gupta empire emerged (4<sup>th</sup> century-6<sup>th</sup> century CE). As with the Mauryans, the empire developed through a series of conquests: individual rulers boasted of conquering as many as twenty other kingdoms. Indeed the Guptas introduced more military innovations than the Mauryans had, including fuller use of cavalry. The empire was divided into ultimately 26 provinces, each with an administrator and an advisory council. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century the empire began to disintegrate, fueled by usurpations by provincial leaders and invasion from the outside. Its passing left little legacy – though the period itself had been prosperous with important artistic and intellectual achievements. India fell back into a welter of smaller entities, some of which recalled some of the Gupta administrative arrangements, while others were more purely localized.

**Aftermath** India after the classical period had no particular difficulty maintaining its cultural and social legacy, with majority Hinduism and the caste system both spreading southward in the subcontinent. The mercantile tradition remained strong as well, though rising competition from Arab merchants in the Indian Ocean posed some problem. But there was no widespread or successful effort to revive internal empire. This meant that India was vulnerable to periodic internal warfare, and also to invasion from outside – now, particularly, by Islamic forces from the west. On the other hand, many local units remained quite

successful, with a tradition of responsibility for a variety of services (supported as well by the occupational assignments of the caste system), back by competent administration.

### Study questions

1. What was the main focus of Indian political theory? What were its limitations?
2. How do religion and the caste system help explain the patterns of government on the subcontinent during the classical period and beyond?
3. Why did India leave such a different political legacy from that of classical China?

### Further reading

Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India: from the origins to AD 1300* (Penguin, 2015)

Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India* (Pearson, 2016)

## POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

### Postclassical India/South Asia

**Overview** The political history of India during the postclassical period is dotted with the rise and fall of a variety of regional empires, in various parts of the subcontinent—but not a great deal of fundamental innovation in government. Many of the regional surges were short-lived. Considerable localism persisted, with republics and small monarchies. Religion remained an important political variable. The majority of regional rulers were Hindu, but some were attracted to Jainism; and there were disputes among various approaches to Hinduism. Many rulers were fairly tolerant, but it was not uncommon, when a regional state expanded through warfare, to see attacks on rival religious groups and destruction of religious sites. On the more positive side, many regimes sponsored important cultural initiatives, including temple building but also support for religiously-based education. Beyond this complex and varied pattern, two developments warrant particular attention.

**Delhi sultanate** The Delhi Sultanate formed as a result of invasions by an Islamic Turkic group, and lasted from 1206 to 1526. At its height, this empire covered most of the subcontinent, though it declined as a result of counterattacks by Hindu kingdoms plus the formation of some smaller Islamic states. The sultanate is credited with integrating India more fully into larger patterns of trade and cultural exchange. From a governance standpoint, two features were particularly noteworthy. (It is also worth mentioning that a woman briefly held power, one of the rare instances in traditional Islamic governments.) The rulers imported more Persian government principles, organizing more centralized administration aimed particularly at raising resources for military support. This included, ultimately, levying a special tax on non-Muslims. Economic intervention increased, again compared to more typical Hindu states, with heightened penalties for businessmen who disobeyed regulations – including price controls in the public markets. Various goods were banned as unnecessary luxuries, save through special license, and a network of informers was employed for enforcement. Agricultural taxes soared as well. Sultans frequently saw themselves as religious representatives, called upon to suppress Hindu activities (and also, later, to resist Mongol invasions, which the regime managed successfully). Prohibitions on anthropomorphic representations in art were enforced. At times, there is no question that the government attacked and destroyed a number of Hindu temples and Buddhist shrines – in some cases building mosques using the same sites and construction materials. (There is no question as well that the regime contributed greatly to the essential eclipse of Buddhism and Buddhist educational institutions on the subcontinent.) However the overall religious policy was not consistent; Hindus were frequently recruited into the bureaucracy, and at times the regime subsidized Hindu religious activities. A common pattern involved temple destruction as part of regional conquest, followed by subsidized reconstruction when stability was restored. On a smaller scale, the Delhi Sultanate promoted increased Muslim presence in India but also some fusion with the family patterns of upper-caste Indians. Needless to say, the religious policies of the Sultanate remain a vigorous bone of contention among Indian historians and politicians at a time of renewed Hindu-Muslim tension in India.

**Regimes in the south** At various points during the postclassical period, larger regional governments emerged in the south, in partial contrast to earlier patterns where smaller units predominated except when an empire successfully expanded from the north. The establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire was particularly noteworthy, on the heels of the expansion and then retreat of the Delhi sultanate and in the effort to restore Hindu rule. The large regional empire took shape in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century and retained vitality for about two centuries, before a period of decline. This was a tolerant regime, protecting Hinduism but adopting Islamic procedures in the royal court. A substantial Muslim minority flourished. As the Vijayanagara declined, a number of effective though smaller monarchies sprang up the south. Overall, improvements in government in the region furthered commercial growth and cultural innovation.

### Study questions

1. Why do the policies of the Delhi sultanate lend themselves to contemporary dispute?
2. Why and how did Hinduism and Hindu political regimes hold on so well despite Islamic invasion?
3. Was the postclassical period, on balance, not one of major political innovation, compared to developments in other regions of Asia?

### Further reading

Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: a political and military history* (Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Richard Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age* (Penguin Books, 2019)

Chandra Salish, *History of Medieval India, 800-1700* (Orient Longman, 2007)

## EARLY MODERN PERIOD

### Early Modern India : The Mughal Empire

**Overview** This was the third great Islamic empire during the post classical period. Like the others in the Middle East, it took shape initially through invasions of an outside group – in this case, Turkic Muslims – using guns made familiar in previous warfare. The empire developed and expanded fairly consistently during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and into the 17<sup>th</sup>, ultimately covering considerable territory in the subcontinent but never the whole. Decline set in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the empire was moribund by the mid-18<sup>th</sup>, as India opened increasingly competition between French and British trading companies, each with government backing. The last Mughal holding collapsed entirely in the 1840s.

**Structure** Under the early emperors the government took on administrative features now familiar both in this region and in the Middle East. Several provinces (*Subah*) were established, each with a governor. Initially twelve in number, their ranks expanded with the empire itself. The Mughals operated from a number of different capital cities over time, and also from a large armed camp which highlighted the ongoing military emphasis.

**Functions** The government was active on a variety of front. Public works engagement was particularly impressive, with a massive road network and a specialized administrative department. . Standardization of currency also contributed to rapid economic growth. On the other hand, taxation rates, particularly for the peasantry, were oppressively high – and the requirement that they be paid in silver encouraged more market participation, which could be challenging. More informally, the Mughals encouraged considerable change in art and architecture (with the Taj Mahal a notable example), and even in cuisine, with new influences, particularly from Persia, interacting with Indian patterns.

**Religion** Ruling a majority Hindu population, early Mughal emperors were widely tolerant. Hindus were employed in the bureaucracy, and the government subsidized some temples and religious activities – while also supporting Islamic ventures. The Emperor Akbar was particularly noteworthy, summoning scholars from various religions and even projecting the possibility of a new, more encompassing faith.. Later emperors, however, began to see an explicit Islamic mission for the state. Bureaucratic recruitment narrowed, and there were outright attacks on Hindu buildings. This mixed record continues to be a matter of debate in Indian politics, with Hindu nationalists highlighting the examples of intolerance and violence (though the continued use of the Taj Mahal as a national symbol represents an interesting complexity).

The religious issue also warrants comparison with the Islamic empires in the Middle East, where arguably the religious focus created certain policy limitations.

**Role in decline** Imperial decisions undoubtedly contributed to the surprisingly rapid decline of the dynasty by 1700. Hindu resistance grew, as did attacks by independent Hindu princes. The taxation rate became increasingly burdensome, and despite earlier growth the economy began to falter – though new British measure to limit Indian industrial imports did not help. Most obviously, the Emperor Aurangzeb simply pressed military expansion too far, creating a military structure that was unsustainable. As a result, the Mughal legacy consisted more clearly of cultural achievements and the mixed religious record than of durable changes to the system of government.

### Study questions

- 1, What were the main functions of the Mughal government?
2. How did religious policy change, and with what results?
3. Why is the Mughal legacy currently a matter of political debate?

### Further reading

Joe Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian frontiers and highroads to empire, 1500-1700* (Routledge, 2002)

Stephen Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: history, art and culture* (Reaktion, 2006)

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### Imperial Government in India

**Imperialism and government** The vast expansion of Western empires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century raised issues of governance that were somewhat different from those faced by countries like Spain in the early modern period. Most obviously, with partial exceptions for southern Africa and Algeria, the new holdings did not gain large European populations. And while there was considerable missionary effort (particularly in Africa), church officials did not assume the kind of administrative duties that their counterparts had done for Spain and Portugal earlier. Nor (except in Oceania) was there massive population decline due to disease. These facts meant that 19<sup>th</sup>-century administrations could be stretched thin – even more than had been the case in the early modern colonies. This in turn could limit the range of reforms that imperial officials would undertake, particularly given the risk of local opposition. Decisions about how to recruit and train locals to participate in government loomed larger than had been the case before – beginning with the question of how many might be considered suitable in the first place. At the same time, imperialist regimes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were explicit about one claim: the natives in the areas under their control were not ready to govern themselves, if indeed they ever would be. The racist “white man’s burden” concept placed great emphasis on the West’s superior political capacity. All of these issues played out in the changing pattern of government in British India, where the Raj ultimately gained control over virtually the whole subcontinent – arguably the largest regime, geographically, in India’s history.

**Before 1857** From an administrative standpoint, British rule in India was conducted through the British East India Company until 1857. The Company controlled a fair amount of territory directly, but also formed alliances with a host of local princes – a few of whom had regional governments of their own. The system excused the British from actually setting up a colonial government. However, from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the British actually set governing policy, with the East India Company serving as agent. And this led to a series of sweeping reforms. Most obviously the British established new rules for landed property. In one region they established a new set of landlords, with peasants as tenants obligated to substantial rent payments (from which the landlords in turn would meet tax obligations to the state). In two other regions the British claimed they confirmed individual land ownership for peasants (replacing earlier village controls) – but this system was complicated by the high tax rates established. Rural poverty

measurably increased. Other reforms somewhat more gingerly took on several Indian family customs. The practice of *sati*, in which in some Hindu regions widows threw themselves on their dead husbands' funeral pyres, was banned – and a new group of Indian reformers, though wary of British rule, agreed with this change. Efforts were made to improve the property rights of widows, and there was discussion about trying to limit child marriage. Deeply-rooted customs like the caste system were not attacked, but the British did believe that they could use government to introduce a number of improvements in Indian society. Finally, it was in the 1850s that the government began to promote railway developments, to improve access to Indian raw materials and to facilitate the movement of troops.

**After 1857: structure** Government structure and policy changed considerably after 1857, when a massive Mutiny by Indian troops, both Hindu and Muslim, called British rule into question; the rising was put down only with great difficulty, though local princes and landlords remained largely loyal to the British. At this point (1858) the British took over government directly, ending the East India Company's role. Earlier arrangements with local princes were firmed up by more formal treaties, though their territories, collectively, covered about a third of the subcontinent. The army was reformed, to promote greater loyalty among the troops. In London, the British organized an India Office, appointing a governor general to oversee the colony, reporting directly to Parliament. About 1500 civil servants were sent out to various parts of the subcontinent. Vowing to improve relationships with Indian civilians, the administration began to recruit a cadre of Indians into the lower levels of civil service, even encouraging them to adopt partially Western dress. By the 1890s manners books began to be written to instruct this minority in how to interact socially with Westerners. Provincial councils were established, with Indian members, and the same was true for municipal administrations. A reform act in 1909 introduced elections for the Indian representatives, who previously had been appointed (the electorate, however, was a minority of upper-class Indians). However, Indians were carefully kept out of the higher administrative levels. A civil service examination system undoubtedly improved the caliber of top officials, but the exams were only administered in Britain and by 1890 only one Indian had managed to win through.

**Policies** The British pulled back from major reform efforts in the wake of the Mutiny. No further land reforms were undertaken, though several Governors-General did reduce taxation rates. Social reform was largely abandoned, as the British queen promised to respect Indian traditions. On the other hand many governors-general remained active in promoting public works, including facilitating telegraph communications and expanding irrigation systems. And key elements of the British law code were applied to India, including one measure outlawing homosexuality; Indian courts were reorganized along British lines, with English as the official language. Several British officials built public clock towers in Indian cities, to promote a "modern" sense of time (a move which prompted some local counterattacks). And there was some effort to promote education, though initiatives here were rather modest (compared for example to developments in Latin America).

**Evaluation** Not surprisingly, the effects of British rule remain widely debated. Some Indians did gain new government experience, even with elections. But the numbers were few, and British paternalistic control remained paramount. Reforms, even in the later period, can be variously interpreted. Many, as in the public works sectors, were designed to facilitate imports of British industrial goods and exports of cheaper Indian products. While later administrations paid some attention to the plight of peasants, major problems, including periods of famine, were not effectively addressed. And from another standpoint, British hesitancy post-Mutiny left a number of traditional practices untouched that arguably should have been addressed. Not surprisingly, British policies led to the growth of Indian nationalism. The Indian National Congress formed in 1885, though its efforts long focused more on seeking a greater role for Indians in the administrative apparatus, not only outright independence. But foundations were being laid for a more vigorous effort after World War I. Finally, British policies post-Mutiny included vigorous efforts to divide Hindus and Muslims; the provinces of Bengal was even divided on religious lines. Here too were seeds for the future.

### Study questions

1. What were the main differences in governance conditions for colonies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century compared to the early modern period?
2. What were the main changes in British policy after the 1857 Mutiny?

3. Why, and on what basis, do most current evaluations emphasize the drawbacks and inadequacies of British policies in India?

### Further reading

Jan Morris and Simon Winchester, *Stones of Empire: the buildings of the Raj* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford University Press, 2005)

Sashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: what the British did to India* (Penguin, 2017)

Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (8<sup>th</sup> ed., University of California Press, 2008)

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### South and Southeast Asia

**Overview** Decolonization, taking hold in these regions from 1946 onward (Philippines), led to a variety of government forms, and diversity has persisted. Straightforward authoritarianism has faded in the region, except in Myanmar where a brief democratic episode has given way to renewed military rule and political suppression. Religion is a less important factor in the region than is true in the Middle East, though Pakistan is an exception, and Brunei is essentially an Islamic monarchy. Several other majority-Islamic countries, such as Indonesia, pay some attention to religious rules but with less intensity. Southeast Asia is also characterized by an important regional institution, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Formed in 1961 as a Cold War grouping, the organization has evolved to manage a number of regional issues with a distinctive spirit of compromise, called the ASEAN way; it also has taken a firm stance against the presence of nuclear weapons. South Asia, in contrast, is more involved in regional conflict.

**Authoritarianism to democracy.** Several countries emerged from colonial rule with a brief pledge of parliamentary democracy, only to give way to an authoritarian ruler. This was the pattern in both Indonesia and the Philippines. In turn however, in the 1980s, substantial democracy returned, with genuine political competition – part of the larger democratic wave of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Malaysia in fact introduced a parliamentary system partly modeled on Britain from independence onward, though freedom of the press has been an issue. The Philippines, after toppling its dictator in the 1980s, did elect a more authoritarian president in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but he pledged to step down of his own accord. Pakistan is something of an intermediate case. The nation began in 1947 as a secular republic, after the bitter split with India; but it declared itself an Islamic republic in 1956, with increased pressure from Islamic political groups. Periods of democratic rule have alternated with military control. The nation of Bangladesh split away from Pakistan in 1971, as a result of democratic protest; this country, a secular republic, has a democratic parliamentary form of government. Singapore offers another distinctive case. The city-state has had an elected government since independence in 1965. However the government exercises tight control over the political process. Singapore also has been a leader since the 1990s in protesting the unduly Western slant of international human rights efforts, arguing that regional definitions should allow for greater emphasis on community cohesion and prosperity, less on individualism.

**Vietnam** This is a nation forged through a combination of anti-colonial national independence movement and communist revolution, winning through finally in the 1970s. After a brief adjustment period the government introduced a policy similar to that of China, with strict political control but considerable latitude for private enterprise in business though under overall state guidance. The neighboring country of Cambodia went through a post-independence period under a brutal dictator responsible for substantial genocide until Vietnamese intervention and a period of United Nations administration led to a new but milder form of authoritarian rule.

**India: government form** Indian nationalists still debate the many shortcomings of British rule (though many Indians partially disagree), including the grudging and slow inclusion of Indians in the actual administration under the Raj. Nevertheless, when India actually set up its own government in 1947, it quickly replicated many features of the British system. A two-house legislature was established, based on universal suffrage, with an independent executive and a separate, often powerful, judiciary. The elected prime minister serves as principal executive True to Indian tradition, and regional realities, the

government was set up on a federal basis, with 25 states and a few other territories. In the states, as well, a parliamentary system operates. Law codes continue to be based heavily on British precedent, though important modifications have been introduced including a measure repealing the outlawing of homosexuality.. India's basic government structure has survived quite well, with a particularly impressive capacity to organize elections for up to 900 million voters with a minimum of corruption or violence – making the nation by far the largest democracy in the world, and by now one of the more stable.

**Functions** Government functions have been fairly standard for a modern regime (qualified of course by the federal system). Basic infrastructure has received great attention, including a recent initiative to expand access to sanitary toilets. The government has worked hard to expand education and promote industrial development, including establishing an import substitution policy to limit imports of items like automobiles in favor of national manufacture. Government support for the “Green revolution” was also an important move. Early on, the new nation abolished the caste system – a huge reform– and over time the government has attempted to support opportunities for the former lowest caste, the *Dalits*, through access to higher education and some government posts – with mixed success. Promotion of women has also been important, with measures taken to protect their independence in voting (seeking to prevent interference by fathers or husbands) and more recently to assure a certain percentage of elected posts for women. Legislation has also sought to limit child marriage while the judiciary has attacked domestic violence – though in both cases with qualified success. In other words, the government has taken an active hand in social issues and even social restructuring. At the same time, limitations have also been important: an effort in the 1970s to promote birth control had to be modified in face of popular opposition. In religion, the nation was established as a secular republic, with religious freedom. However, Hindu-Muslim tensions have been a recurrent problem and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, under a new Hindu Nationalist prime minister, government measures against Muslims, including police raids at Muslim universities, have become more common (along with growing restrictions on the freedom of the press). On another front, while the government has historically tried to avoid foreign entanglements, it has maintained a large military force while also establishing nuclear capacity, refusing to sign onto the international non-proliferation agreement. Recurrent clashes with Pakistan and China have fallen short of major war. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century India has lagged behind Chinese military and economic expansion, creating a growing issue for the future. Finally, the government has yet to establish a very clear position on the environment, a crucial issue in a huge nation that burns a great deal of coal and faces considerable atmospheric pollution.

### Study questions

1. What are the varying roles of religion in the governments of South and Southeast Asia?
2. What is the Singaporean argument on human rights?
3. Why have a few countries in the region, headed by India, had distinctive success in maintaining democratic political forms?

### Further reading

Marc Gilbert, *Southeast Asia in World History* (Oxford University Press, 2017)

Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: the history of the world's largest democracy* (Picador, 2007)

Paul Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence* ((2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge University Press 1994)