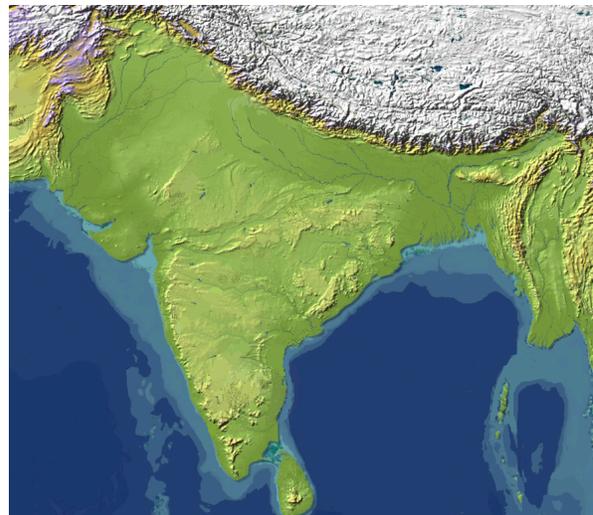


## V. India and the World We Live In

### A. Post-Colonial India and South Asia

1. The key studying the history of India is to recognize that everything about its history is inextricably linked to its neighbors in the region that is usually called “South Asia.”
2. South Asia is a geographical area, “under” the Himalayas (if north is placed at the top of the map) and framed by the long peninsula of “Southeast Asia” to the East, and the mountainous region of Afghanistan and “Central Asia” to the West.
3. Given its size, it is sometimes referred to as the “Indian Subcontinent.” (The region on the maps below is comparable in size to Europe.)
4. The history of the region framed by mountains on every side is a unified story, which only produced the unusual configuration consisting of 1) India, 2) Pakistan and Bangladesh, and 3) a set of smaller countries, starting in **1947**.
5. Prior to **1947** the entire region, except for Afghanistan, was ruled by the British Empire. Then following **World War II<sup>±</sup> (1939-45)**, the British abandoned their worldwide empire, and granted independence to South Asia.
6. Because of the history we will now explore, the region fractured into three main pieces—India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—along religious lines.
7. The culture of South Asia continues to be defined by its response to the prior reality of being in someone else’s empire. The term for this kind of culture is “*post-colonial*.”
8. *Post-colonial* cultures like India (it is not the only one) share a few key traits:
  - a) They are newly independent. The fact that India became independent in 1947 makes it feel like it’s a stretch to still call it “*newly* independent,” but the key is that you also have:
  - b) They have not yet managed to define a specific identity. Even though India has been independent for over 70 years, it still hasn’t been able to build a national culture. Ever since independence there has been a desire to create an identity called “Hindu nationalism,” based on the most ancient culture of the region.
  - c) Political instability is another common problem, including wars and civil wars, because the people do not feel bound together as a people, which makes it more difficult for them to resolve political differences.



A terrain (elevation) map with false colors dramatically illustrates how “South Asia” is framed by mountains on all sides. Two major river basins, also frame the geography of the Indian Subcontinent. The arrangement of countries that most people would take for granted on the map only emerged in 1947.

- d) Insularity is another common trait, because cultures that are struggle to define an identity are wary of outside influences and control.

## B. Hindu Culture

1. Indian culture is distinguished by an exotic and unique form of paganism (a polytheistic religious culture, comparable to ancient Greece, with many gods).
2. In the west, this religion is often described as “Hinduism,” which is a misnomer. (An “-ism” in this approach is an integrated set of ideas or beliefs revolving around some key set of tenets. In that sense, there is no “Hinduism.” The essence of Hindu belief is that it is *not* integrated. It is a miscellany of many different beliefs and practices.)
3. Hindus may exhibit a devotion to any number of different deities, and engage in a wide variety of religious rituals, in a probably unlimited number of combinations. There is no single organized church; there is no centralized system of religious authority, no dogma, and no single religious text.



Vishnu (left) and Ganesh (right) are among the surprising representations of the supernatural, as envisioned in Hindu Culture.

4. There are two historically significant outcomes to the rise and continuation of such a culture in South Asia. Hindu culture has always been **a-historical** and politically **un-integrated**.
  - a) The prioritization of “spiritual” life among Hindus means that Hindu Culture never developed an attachment to history. No one studied it. No one tracked it. As strange as it may seem, *there is no history* in Hindu Culture, which produces a very unusual outcome. We have no idea of its historical origins.
  - b) The lack of interest in history is matched with a general lack of interest in politics as well. Organizing worldly affairs and studying them historically go hand in hand. In India, neither happened. Consequently, South Asia was never politically integrated (it never become one country or lasting empire).
5. Archeological evidence demonstrates that there have been a succession of ancient cultures in the Indus river valley for thousands of years. Beyond that, however, we know virtually nothing about “Indus River Valley Civilization” or its successor “Vedic Civilization.” For the latter there are spiritual texts (called “vedas”) and legends in the writing form known as Sanskrit, but no history. This makes it impossible to date the origin of Hindu Culture, and thus the method that will be used for our purposes will be to denote its origin point as ???? BC.