

The Choices Program

Indian Independence and the Question of Partition

WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
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Reviewed by William J. Tolley

I was first introduced to The Choices Program in 2006 during a weeklong intensive seminar on controversial issues in the social studies classroom, led by Diane Hess from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Since then, for the past eight years, I have enjoyed introducing my students to the same compelling content and the same interactive process: first in my AP World History courses in New York City and then in my IB History courses—and more broadly in the social sciences—with my students in Brazil. With increased focus on the need to develop twenty-first-century skills (collaboration, communication, creativity, innovation) along with the ever-present need to nurture democratic-minded thinking and civic mindsets and methods among our students, curriculum units published by The Choices Program at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University are more relevant than ever. These units, like the recently published *Indian Independence and the Question of Partition*, continue to provide teachers with streamlined, clear, and engaging platforms for developing the global and critical thinkers we need as leaders and citizens today and tomorrow.

Indian Independence and the Question of Partition helps fill a potential gap too often present in history and social studies courses. Lacking coverage in the provided textbooks and unfamiliar with the complexity of the subject themselves, many teachers rely on a showing of Attenborough's *Gandhi*, a discussion of the Salt March, and the influence of the Mahatma on Martin Luther King Jr.—Amritsar becomes a footnote; Gandhi becomes a one-man revolution (Nehru and Jinnah who?); and the rising expectations of India's peasant, political, and religious movements never enter play. As the world's largest democracy, a BRIC (an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, and China) country, a nuclear power, and a leader in Asia and the world, India deserves better treatment of its genesis than this, and our students deserve a better understanding in order to better navigate their increasingly connected and complex world.

Indian Independence and the Question of Partition, by focusing on the controversial issue of partition, recalibrates the narrative in a way that better-addresses the long-term causes and issues relevant to India's rebirth. It may be impossible to understand modern India with-

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out discussing decolonization and the impact of the British, but empire should costar with extant Indian social, political, religious, and ethnic complexities, and not take center stage. The unit prompts us to ask our students and ourselves: "Why did migration and violence overshadow Indian independence?"; "What role did religion play in dividing communities?"; and "Was partition inevitable?" These questions cannot be thoughtfully answered by discussing decolonization alone, and many questions remain unanswered when such attempts are made.

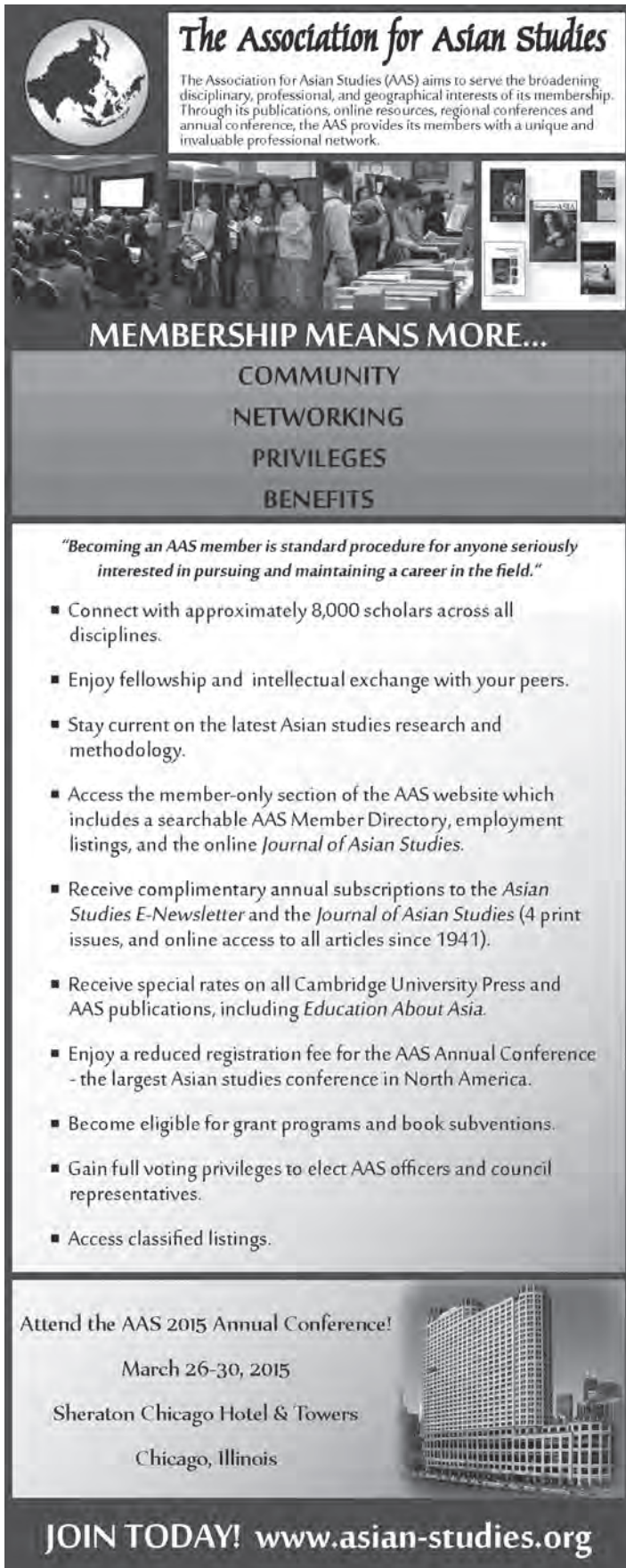
By starting with the historical development of Hindu/Muslim relations through coverage of the Mughal Empire, *Indian Independence and the Question of Partition* not only reorients the narrative, but lays the foundation for a meaningful, richly informed culminating debate that is the hallmark of all Choices units. By the end of the two clear chapters of background reading (which include informative maps, diagrams, color images, and primary source material), discussants will obtain a firm grasp of the difference between the rule of the British East India Company (BEIC) and the Crown, the development of the Indian National Congress, and the causes and consequences of the Revolt of 1857, among many other relevant historical phenomena. More importantly, they will learn that British rule started in Bengal, that Bengal and Pakistan are two very different places,

and that "All-India" politics was more of an ideal and a temporary truce (and a historical oversimplification) than a political reality. To the credit of the unit, unlike many other materials that embed his influence throughout their coverage, Gandhi is not mentioned until page 23, when appropriate, with the introduction of mass protest movements.

Perhaps the greatest strength built into the unit is the calculated decision of the developers to debate the partition of Bengal rather than partition in general. Especially in survey courses, partition is too often presented as a showdown between Gandhi and Jinnah, with Nehru wringing his hands in frustration and Mountbatten playing gentlemanly referee. By emphasizing the debate over the creation of what would become East Pakistan, Choices brings the political goals and the struggles between the Muslim League, local Hindu political groups, and the briefly lived United Bengal movement to the fore, challenging the oft-digested notion that the primary element in deciding the status of partition in

The screenshot shows the Choices Program website interface. At the top, it says 'THE CHOICES PROGRAM' above a historical map of India. Below the map is a navigation menu with links like 'Curriculum Catalog', 'U.S. History', 'World History', 'Curriculum in Development', 'Formats & Ordering Information', 'Scholars Online Videos', 'Teaching with the News', 'Teacher's Corner', 'Professional Development', 'Student Forums', 'About Us', and 'Frequently Asked Questions'. The main content area is titled 'India/Pakistan' and features the unit title 'Indian Independence and the Question of Partition', its first edition date (August 2013), and a Franklin Buchanan Prize Winner award. There is a small image of a historical scene. Below this is an 'Overview' section with text describing the partition of 1947. To the right is an 'Order' section with a price list: Print (\$35), PDF (\$30), Deluxe (\$55), Class Set (\$16.50 ea.), eText (\$240), iBooks Textbooks (\$6.99), and ITBB (\$5.00). There is also a 'Supplemental Materials' section and a 'Scholars Online Videos' section. At the bottom, there is contact information for The Choices Program at Brown University and a search bar.

Screen capture of the Choices Program web page at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/detail.php?id=205>



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Bengal was Gandhi's public fasts. By shucking the received narrative, *Indian Independence and the Question of Partition* also better-lays the foundation for a discussion of India's contemporary importance and ongoing internal and external struggles—its tenuous relationship with Pakistan, in particular. The unit thus provides coverage worthy of India and our students, and is more likely to please educators interested in alternatives to the excessive Eurocentrism that appears in many textbooks.

Beyond the greatly improved historical coverage of the subject, *Indian Independence and the Question of Partition* is worth the attention of high school and college instructors because, like all Choices units, it provides a replete project-based learning simulation with heavy emphasis on developing critical thinking skills and global perspectives. Overwhelmed teachers will be relieved to find that incorporating *Indian Independence and the Question of Partition* into their course not only enriches the content and stimulates debate, but also brings with it a rich set of resources. In conjunction, the student text and teacher resource book provide the busy educator with meticulously developed reading and discussion study guides, vocabulary lists and exercises, primary sources and evaluation tools, data and geography analysis charts, graphic organizers, a handy glossary, and appendices with extension ideas and materials. The unit is particularly appropriate for AP World History and IB World History courses, as well as other social studies courses and electives like Model United Nations, where the debate can be readily adapted into a Historical Security Council session.

In addition, for teachers who are experimenting with flipped-classroom and blended-learning models, the supplementary (from my perspective, *essential*) *Scholars Online* videos provide concise mini-lectures on some of the critical questions concerning Partition. Delivered by the consulting scholars of the unit themselves, the videos provide additional insight via clearly rendered presentations that include simple supporting graphics highlighting key points and concepts. As an IB teacher, I was particularly pleased to see often-overlooked questions like "How did the two World Wars impact demands for Indian independence?" and the even more provoking "Can the discussion of India's independence be separated from the discussion of partition?"—the latter offering teachers a springboard for brilliant forays into debating the independence of Israel/Palestine and Ireland.

Choosing to integrate *Indian Independence and the Question of Partition* into your course is choosing to make a statement about what the learning experience is in your classroom. For instructors who wish to cultivate democratic mindedness, deliberation skills, and interactivity with historical content and its influence on contemporary issues, the authentic learning experience offered by Choices is one of the best options available. ■

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