

Fifty Years of Freedom
By JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The Indian people's long struggle for freedom from British rule ended 50 years ago. On Aug. 15, 1947, India finally became an independent nation within the British Commonwealth, after years of work by Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. The two first met in 1916 at a convention of the Indian National Congress, after which Nehru joined Gandhi's nonviolent campaign for independence.

As Stanley Wolpert explains in a new book on Nehru, India's Independence Day was the moment Nehru felt he had worked for all his life. He had even spent nine years in jail toward this goal. After championing human rights for so long, his greatest joy was to see the Indian youth stand up to British rule and win their freedom.

"At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps," Nehru said just before India became independent, "India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance."

As India's soul found utterance, Nehru became the nation's first prime minister. The evening of Aug. 15, in his first broadcast as prime minister, Nehru warned India that "the burden of foreign domination is done away with, but freedom brings its own...burdens." This burden of freedom still troubles India, but the victory Nehru and Gandhi won for human rights continues to inspire people the world over to stand up.

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