

Stage II: 1939 to 1950

As a result of the Second World War, the movement toward independence in the then colonial areas of South-East Asia became irresistible. The Labour Government of the United Kingdom under Mr. Clement Attlee acted to enable India to achieve independence on August 15, 1947. Since the Hindu and Muslim groups in India were unable to reach political agreement, independence also resulted in partition and the creation of Pakistan. Ceylon became independent in 1948.

In 1948, India signified its intention of becoming a Republic and at the same time its desire to retain its association with the Commonwealth. At a Prime Ministers' Meeting that year a formula was devised which was acceptable to all members of the Commonwealth. This formula designated the King as the symbol of the free association of the independent member nations of the Commonwealth "and, as such, the Head of the Commonwealth". India became a Republic on January 26, 1950. The head of the Indian State is the President of India (whereas the head of the Canadian State is the Queen, represented by the Governor General); but the Head of the Commonwealth is the Queen and she is so recognized by India. Pakistan became a Republic under similar conditions on March 23, 1956, and Ceylon has announced its intention of doing so.

Thus during the period 1939-1950, the Commonwealth had changed from six (later five) predominantly Anglo-Saxon nations to eight members, predominantly of Asia origin, with a combined population of about 540 millions. The nature of the Commonwealth, in its constitutional arrangements, its racial content, and in its numbers, had been transformed.

Stage III: 1950 Onwards

Since 1950, this transformation has proceeded most slowly, though there were, even then, colonies which would obviously desire independence within the next decade. Now the first two of these, the Gold Coast, or Ghana as it is now to be called, and Malaya, have emerged as independent nations within the Commonwealth.

Self-government has developed rapidly in the Gold Coast. It was only in 1951 that its largely nominated Legislative Council became an Executive Council composed of a majority of elected representatives. By 1954 the Constitution of the Gold Coast had developed to such an extent that it was to all practical purposes a self-governing area. In 1954 and again in 1956 general elections with direct universal suffrage were held. On May 19, 1956, in a plebiscite held under UN auspices, the residents of the Trust Territory of British Togoland voted by a two-thirds majority to join Ghana when it came into existence. On March 6, 1957 both these areas joined the community of free and independent nations under the name of Ghana.

On February 8, 1956, the United Kingdom Government and Malayan representatives in London concluded an agreement providing for the transfer of full sovereignty to the Federation of Malaya by August 31, 1957, if possible. It was agreed that when the time came to transfer external defence to an independent Malaya, a treaty of defence and mutual assistance would be concluded giving the United