“Historians believe that Bengal, the area comprising present-day Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal, was settled in about 1000 B.C. by Dravidian-speaking peoples who were later known as the Bang. The first great indigenous empire to spread over most of present-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh was the Mauryan Empire (circa 320-180 B.C.), whose most famous ruler was Asoka (circa 273-232 B.C.). Although the empire was well administered and politically integrated, little is known of any reciprocal benefits between it and eastern Bengal. The western part of Bengal, however, achieved some importance during the Mauryan period because vessels sailed from its ports to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The Turkish conquest of the subcontinent was a long, drawn-out process covering several centuries. It began in Afghanistan with the military forays of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1001. By the early thirteenth century, Bengal fell to Turkish armies.

The Indian subcontinent had had indirect relations with Europe by both overland caravans and maritime routes, dating back to the fifth century B.C. The lucrative spice trade with India had been mainly in the hands of Arab merchants. By the fifteenth century, European traders had come to believe that the commissions they had to pay the Arabs were prohibitively high and therefore sent out fleets in search of new trade routes to India. The arrival of the Europeans in the last quarter of the fifteenth century marked a great turning point in the history of the subcontinent. The British East India Company, a private company formed in 1600, directly off-loaded into the Indian subcontinent.

The British East India Company, a private company formed in 1600, directly off-loaded into the Indian subcontinent. Clive’s victory was consolidated in 1764 at the Battle of Buxar on the Ganges, where he defeated the Mughal emperor. As a result, the British East India Company was granted the title of diwan (collector of the revenue) in the areas of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, making it the supreme, but not titular, governing power. Henceforth the British would govern Bengal and from there extend their rule to all of India. Pakistan itself had been created on August 15, 1947, largely the result of communal passions pitting Hindus against Muslims. Pakistan was divided into two wings, separated by 1,600 kilometers of Indian Territory, with Islam only a tenuous link between the two wings. Of paramount importance to East Pakistanis was the Bangla (before 1971 usually referred to as Bengali) language and culture, a consideration not appreciated by the West Wing of Pakistan until it was too late. Bangladesh, formerly the East Wing of Pakistan, emerged as an independent nation in December 1971.” (Library of Congress Country Studies).