US Forces Pacific Culture Guide

INDIA

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and successfully achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information it contains will help you understand the unique cultural features of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for achieving mission success (Photo: US Army colonel poses with Indian youth during Yudh Abhyas 2014 exercise).

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 is the "Culture General" section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on South Asia.

Part 2 is the "Culture Specific" section, which describes unique cultural features of Indian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: Indian yoga instructor teaches US Army soldier proper breathing techniques).

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and belief systems into categories–what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"–in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains–which include kinship, language and communication, social and political systems, and others (see chart on next page)–as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even categorize those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques. Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption.

Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief

in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

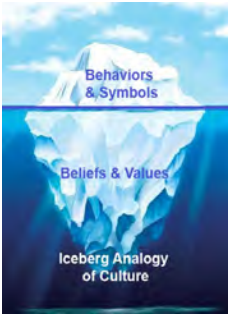
This collective perspective forms our worldview–how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an

accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true–regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout South Asia, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

South Asia comprises 5 countries on the mainland: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, and 2 island countries, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, located south of India in the Indian Ocean. Over thousands of years, many different ethnic and cultural groups migrated through and settled in South Asia. The region's first civilization, the Indus Valley Civilization, emerged in modern-day Pakistan around 3000 BC. Inhabitants developed a complex writing system, built well-planned cities, and manufactured bronze tools (Photo: Indus Valley Civilization vessel, 2600-2450 BC).

Beginning with the Mauryan Empire (325-185 BC), the region experienced several cycles as empires consolidated and then splintered into smaller kingdoms and states before consolidating again. The Gupta Empire (320-550 AD) ushered in a period of peace and security known as the Classical Age. During this period, South Asians made major advances in literature, art, mathematics, medicine, and astronomy. The Hindu religion also rapidly developed and spread.

Following the fall of the Gupta Empire, warring kingdoms and Central Asian invaders known as the Mughals competed for dominance through the 15th century. During the 16th century, a series of Mughal rulers gradually conquered most of South Asia, founding the Mughal Empire and spreading Islam. At the height of their power in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Mughals greatly influenced art, literature, and architecture (Illustration: A village scene by a Mughal Empire painter).

Meanwhile, the Portuguese had reached India in the late 15th century. By the early 17th century the French, British, and Portuguese were competing for control of the international spice trade as well as influence over Mughal leaders. The British emerged victorious, taking control of most of the subcontinent, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives by the late 18th century. Remote Bhutan and Nepal remained independent monarchies throughout the subsequent British colonial era.

Anti-British nationalist movements arose in the early 20th century. The Indian National Congress Party emerged as the largest anti-colonial movement but failed to attract Muslims, who feared Hindu dominance. Instead, Muslims formed their own nationalist party, the All-India Muslim League, which advocated for a separate independent Muslim state. In response to these nationalist pressures, the British government divided most of its South Asian colonial empire into 2 independent nations – Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India – in 1947. Sri Lanka gained independence a year

later. In 1965 the Maldives regained its independence from Britain, and in 1971, Bangladesh declared and won its independence from Pakistan.

Since gaining independence, India has remained a fairly stable democracy, while Pakistan has resorted to intermittent periods of military rule. Bhutan and Nepal have explored transition from monarchies to democracies. Sri Lanka emerged from a 26-year civil war in 2009, while the Maldives and Bangladesh have struggled to improve their democratic governance.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

South Asia's strategic position between East Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, along with its ethnic diversity, greatly influenced its political and social systems. From ancient times, traders, migrants, and conquerors from various places and cultures passed through or settled in the region. These peoples included the Persians, Scythians, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, and Afghans (Photo: Jhong village in Nepal).

Historically, South Asia consisted of hundreds of kingdoms and principalities that no empire could control for long. Even under British colonial rule, over 200 rulers retained control of minor territories. Despite this fragmentation, the British colonial bureaucracy successfully administered these varied polities and interests for over 150 years, eventually becoming the framework for South Asia's post-independence governments.

Today, India retains the region's most stable democratic political system. Pakistan began restoring democratic processes in 2008, while Bangladesh and the Maldives struggle with corruption and unstable leadership transitions. Sri

Lanka maintains democratic institutions despite leadership's harsh tactics against political opposition. Nepal's government has dissolved several times since electing its first President in 2008, remaining deadlocked over drafting a new constitution. Bhutan largely closed itself off to the world, ceding control of its foreign relations to India between 1949-2007. Thereafter, the Bhutani king has been directing democratization efforts, overseeing the first parliamentary elections in 2007.

With India the dominant power in South Asia, the other South Asian countries are wary of its intentions. Pakistan especially rejects India's role as a regional leader. Ongoing territorial disputes between India and Pakistan have erupted in armed clashes several times since independence and compelled both countries to test nuclear weapons in 1998.

Meanwhile, relations between India and China are strained for several reasons, most notably China's close ties with Pakistan, rivalry over access to resources and regional influence, and ongoing territorial disputes. The US has strong ties to the region and seeks deeper economic, political, and security cooperation (Photo: US Airman with Bangladeshi schoolboys).

Modern South Asia encompasses hundreds of ethnicities, whose group identities influence regional politics. For example, ethnic nationalism prompted Bengalis to declare independence from Pakistan, establishing Bangladesh as the only ethnically homogenous state in South Asia. Seeking to create an independent Tamil state within Sri Lanka, Tamil insurgents fought and lost a 26-year civil war against the majority Sinhalese in 2009.

India is home to thousands of tribal groups, where both religion and ethnicity are powerful forces in politics. Although officially abolished in India and antithetical to the Islamic belief system, the ancient Hindu-based caste system still plays a role in South Asian society. This system organizes society into a set of

hierarchical and hereditary groups. At the bottom of the caste system are the ***Dalits*** (the “oppressed” or “downtrodden”), who are largely impoverished and uneducated, and who face strong discrimination.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

South Asia is the birthplace of 2 major world religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. Hinduism’s roots trace back to the Vedic Period (ca. 1750-500 BC). During the Gupta Empire from the 4th-6th centuries, these early beliefs and traditions evolved into the foundations of modern Hinduism. Today, large majorities of the populations of India and Nepal are Hindu.

Siddhartha Gautama, who achieved enlightenment and became “the Buddha,” founded Buddhism around 500 BC. In the ensuing centuries, Buddhism spread through South Asia into East and Southeast Asia. Starting in the 4th century AD, Buddhism began to decline in South Asia, virtually disappearing from the region by the 12th century. While the percentage of South East Asian Buddhists is small, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have Buddhist majorities and Nepal a significant Buddhist community (Illustration: Wall painting in a Bhutan Buddhist temple).

Beginning in the 8th century, Muslims spread Islam throughout much of the North and West of South Asia, culminating in the founding of the Muslim Mughal Empire in the 16th century. Although the early Mughal rulers tolerated other religions, later rulers sometimes persecuted followers of other religions.

Under British colonial rule, South Asians were generally free to practice the religion of their choice. Religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims led to the breakup of the British Empire into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.

Today, South Asians continue to profess diverse religious beliefs. In addition to its majority Hindu population (80%), India is home to Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs, among other traditions. While Sri Lanka recognizes no state religion, its constitution gives “foremost place” to Buddhism, which is the state religion of Bhutan. Although both Pakistan (96% Muslim) and India enshrine religious freedom in their constitutions, increasing Islamic governance in Pakistan and growing Hindu nationalism in India create tensions with minority religious groups in both countries.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are important to South Asians. The traditional South Asian ideal family consists of several generations of the male line living in one household, along with their wives, minor children, and unmarried adult daughters. Women leave their parents’ home when they marry and join their husband’s family. Inheritance passes from father to son, and traditionally the family engages in business or a craft together (Photo: Khasia people in Bangladesh).

In many South Asian families, parents have a great deal of influence over their children’s marriages. Arranged marriages are common, and young women often marry older men. In some regions, families encourage their children to marry within their caste. Hindus consider marriage to be an eternal bond, a belief that contributes to low divorce rates. Of note, polygyny,

the practice of a man having multiple wives, is legal in most South Asian countries. Two exceptions are India, which outlawed polygyny for Hindus (non-Hindus may engage in the practice), and Nepal, which outlawed polygyny completely.

A growing rural-urban divide in economic and educational opportunities across South Asia results in notable differences in rural and urban family life. The traditional family structure is still common in rural areas, where families engage in agricultural or village economies. In urban centers, where more educational and economic opportunities are available, the household is usually much smaller and family structures are much more diverse.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles (Photo: Nepalese woman).

South Asia's dominant philosophies and religions (Hinduism and Islam) privilege the male's role as leader and provider and stress female subordination. Despite progressive gender equality policies, South Asian women face continued challenges to their participation in the political system, the labor market, and education. While laws supporting equal rights exist in many South Asian countries, the legal systems often remain discriminatory and rarely uphold such laws.

In much of South Asia, women still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers. Access to education is unequal in India, Pakistan, and Nepal, where fewer girls than boys enroll in school. South Asian girls typically marry at a young age, and over 35% of South Asian women have a child before age 20.

Women also face discrimination in the workforce. Across the region, women comprise only 19% of employment outside of

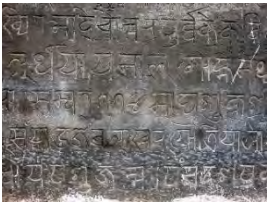
agriculture, and their participation in the labor force has declined since 1990. South Asian women do participate in politics, having served as heads of state in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, women remain underrepresented in politics, holding less than 23% of the seats in national parliaments.

The Maldives has topped the South Asian countries in gender equality surpassing Sri Lanka, ranking 81st among 189. Nepal also has relatively high gender equality, with over 82% of Nepalese women employed across nearly all sectors.

Homosexuality is illegal in every South Asian country except Nepal. Homosexuals suffer discrimination and stigmatization across most of South Asia.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.



South Asia is linguistically diverse – about 450 languages are in daily use in India alone, although most are spoken only within very limited geographical regions. South Asia's languages belong to 4 groups: Indo-European (languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu, are spoken widely in India and Pakistan), Dravidian (such as Tamil, spoken in India and Sri Lanka), Sino-Tibetan (such as Dzongkha, spoken in Bhutan) and Austro-Asiatic (such as Santhali, spoken in India) (Photo: 17th century stone inscription in Nepal, written in 15 languages).

Many South Asians are multilingual, although some regions exhibit more linguistic diversity than others. For example, while Hindi is India's national language, the government recognizes English as a subsidiary official language and grants official status to 21 other languages. By contrast, most people in Bangladesh speak Bangla as their first language, while

Dzongkha is Bhutan's only official language. In Pakistan, large populations speak Punjabi, Sindhi, and Saraiki, yet the government is slowly transitioning the official language from English to Urdu, mother tongue of only 8% of the population.

South Asians generally consider English a sign of education or elite status. The British colonial powers that controlled most of South Asia during the 19th and early 20th centuries promoted the use of English. Since independence, English has remained a national or official language in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, where it is often used in official government business alongside local languages. Nepal also uses English unofficially in government and business. The only countries that do not use English to conduct official business are Bangladesh and Bhutan.

South Asians use a variety of scripts, some developed in the region and others adopted from abroad. For example, Hindi, Nepali, and Sanskrit, spoken in India and Nepal, use variations of the Devanagari script from northern India. By contrast, Urdu and Sindhi, spoken in India and Pakistan, use the Arabic script from the Middle East. Of note, to write Punjabi, Pakistanis use the Arabic script, while Indians use the Devanagari script (Illustration: "India" written in Hindi Devanagari script).

भारत

While some South Asians avoid confrontation during interactions, others are more demonstrative. Generally, South Asians value respect in interpersonal relations. Of note, specific greetings, customs, and traditions used to demonstrate respect within interactions can differ significantly by region and culture.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured,

formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Traditionally valuing education, South Asian societies have established various types of formal institutions of learning. Prior to the colonial period, most education took place in religious institutions such as the Hindu ***gurukula*** (a school headed by a ***guru***, or teacher), Buddhist monasteries, and Islamic ***madrasas*** (religious schools). Schools taught a variety of subjects, including religion, philosophy, warfare, medicine, astronomy, literature, mathematics, and logic.

During the colonial period, the British introduced secular education in the English language with the goal of spreading Western ideas and creating a class of South Asians that could support the British bureaucracy. The British suppressed instruction in South Asian literature, religion, and philosophy in order to “modernize” residents. Educated South Asians in turn opened their own schools that advocated South Asian history and culture. This rising consciousness among the South Asian elite contributed to nationalist movements of the early to mid-20th century, eventually leading to independence for most of South Asia.

Today, South Asian leaders view education as a tool for developing the region. The South Asian nations invested heavily in education in the first decade of the 21st century, resulting in an increase in primary school enrollment rates from 75% in 2001 to 89% in 2010. Despite this success, 28 million South Asian children remain unenrolled, disproportionately girls, while approximately 1/3 of students receive low quality education that leaves them without basic literacy and math skills (Photo: School children in India).

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building.

Conversely, in most South Asian cultures, establishing and maintaining relationships with others can take precedence over accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. Networking is very important in South Asia, as introductions through a reputable 3rd party can facilitate relationship-building by providing immediate credibility with a new contact.

Concepts of personal space differ throughout the region. While many Indians prefer to have at least an arm's length of space, Pakistani men tend to stand closely when speaking. In some regions, interactions between men and women may be restricted. In other regions, unrelated men and women may not interact at all. This segregation is particularly true in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and northwest India, where many wealthy and middle-class Muslim and Hindu families follow a tradition called ***purdah***. This practice dictates that women a secluded in their family homes and wear veils on the rare occasions they go outside.

The rhythm of daily life changes during religious festivals and holidays. For example, during the Muslim month of Ramadan, many restaurants close and people enjoy a shorter work day. During the 5-day Hindu festival Diwali, participants open their doors and windows so the goddess of wealth may enter. Religious space is also subject to a variety of traditions restricting dress, actions, and types of participants, depending on the religion or local culture. For example, men must remove their shirts when entering some Hindu temples, while the Haji Ali dargah, a Muslim shrine in India, is off-limits to women (Photo: Performers celebrating Republic Day in India).

Some practices concerning the use of space are common across the region. For example, visitors typically remove their shoes upon entering a home, temple, or mosque, and sometimes before entering an office or other private spaces.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and

style. Most of South Asia's forms of artistic expression reflect the diversity of the region's cultures and ethnicities as well as the influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Elaborate Hindu temples in India, Buddhist domed shrines in Nepal, and Islamic art and architecture, such as the world famous Taj Mahal, illustrate the artistic variety of South Asian culture.

Traditional dance, art, and literature have experienced revival following a period of suppression under the British colonial powers. Ancient epic poems, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana,* inspire modern mask and puppet theater, as well as television series. Contemporary novelists and poets explore a unique South Asian perspective while writing in both local languages and English. India features a thriving movie industry based in Mumbai. Known as Bollywood (a term constructed by combining Bombay and Hollywood), it is the world's largest film industry (Photo: Dancers performing at an Indian cultural event).

Cricket is the most popular sport in South Asia where India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka each having won the Cricket World Cup at least once. India and Pakistan have a strong cricket rivalry and have used cricket games as diplomatic ice breakers. India also is experiencing a Kabaddi revival – a 4,000 year old game combining elements of wrestling and rugby. Additionally, many South Asians enjoy soccer and field hockey.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

South Asian cuisine is known for its variety and simplicity. Most meals are based on a staple, usually flat wheat bread in the North and Northwest and rice in the East and South. South Asians eat both bread and rice with lentils, beans, vegetables, and yogurt prepared with chilies and other spices. Because

meat is expensive, most South Asians consume it only on special occasions. Of note, observant Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol; many Hindus do not eat beef or are vegetarians; and many Buddhists are vegetarians. Coffee is popular in the South, while tea is more common in the North.

Malnutrition, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and unsanitary drinking water are major health concerns throughout South Asia. Since 1990, chronic malnutrition has declined by almost half in South Asia, falling from 61% to 35%. However, the number of children who are stunted, underweight, or under height remains high and has even increased in some countries.

While most countries have implemented programs to fight the spread of malaria and HIV/AIDS, these programs are hindered by poor quality healthcare systems. Approximately 6% of South Asians still lack access to improved water. Consequently, dysentery and other waterborne diseases are prevalent and a major cause of death among children (Photo: American and Nepali doctors provide medical care during PACANGEL Project Hope in 2014).

South Asian countries face many challenges in providing healthcare to their growing populations. Unequal socioeconomic development has resulted in significant disparities in health and access to healthcare. As an exception to these trends, Sri Lankan life expectancy rates are significantly higher than the region's average due to the governmental provision of universal healthcare.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. While most South Asians practiced subsistence agriculture prior to the arrival of Europeans, the region also produced spices and luxury items. Jewelry and fine woven goods are made both for local consumption and trade with East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

Despite building communication, road, and rail infrastructure across South Asia, the British colonial administration did little to develop and modernize South Asian economies. At independence in 1947, the former British colonies in South Asia were some of the poorest countries in the world.

The South Asian nations followed different economic development trajectories following independence. India and Pakistan both implemented economic systems that mix market economics with significant government planning and control. Over the last 60 years, both countries have undergone periods of strong economic growth. In contrast, Bhutan closed its borders to external economic and cultural influences until the 1990s, retaining its traditional agrarian economy.

South Asia as a whole has averaged 5% economic growth over the last 20 years. The economies of India and Pakistan have diversified into industrial, service, and technology sectors. By contrast, the economies of Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives remain largely undeveloped. Despite its strong overall economic growth, South Asia faces numerous economic challenges, including almost 260 million people living in poverty. Even in India, with its relatively developed economy, much of the population has not reaped benefits from economic progress – 42% of the Indian population is employed in agriculture, with few farmers able to grow more than they need to subsist (Photo: Street vendors in India).

The region's economies are still recovering from the 2008 global financial crisis, which reduced demand for South Asian exports and slowed investment in the region.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Since the end of the colonial period, as South Asian economies have developed at different rates, modern technology has spread unevenly through the region.

India has made extensive investments in its transportation infrastructure, creating the world's 2nd largest road network and a rail system that ranks among the busiest in the world. Despite these modern alternatives, many Indians still use oxen, camels, or even elephants for labor and transport, even in urban areas. Pakistan's existing infrastructure is deteriorating due to government neglect. Nepal has very little modern transportation infrastructure, limiting its residents to non-mechanized means of transport outside the capital city of Kathmandu (Photo: Train station in India).

While most countries reported cell phone and Internet usage rates between 0% and 3% in 2004, Internet usage grew rapidly over the next decade, with most countries reporting usage rates over 34% by 2017. Cell phones are very popular, with most countries reporting usage of at least 87 subscriptions per 100 people in 2018. The Maldives leads the region, with an average of 166 cell subscriptions per 100 people.

South Asia faces challenges in meeting its growing energy demand. India is the world's 3rd largest energy consumer and the 2nd largest producer of coal, which supplies approximately half its energy needs. Bhutan is South Asia's only net energy exporter, distributing about 70% of its generated electricity to India. Nuclear and hydropower are growing sources of energy.

Bhutan and Nepal have been slow to pursue international trade and investment. Other South Asian countries have had more open economic policies, but their international trade and investment relationships often suffer from internal instability and lack of resources. With greater economic openness since the 1980s and recent improvements in domestic stability, South Asian nations are developing greater economic partnerships with countries such as China, the US, and Japan.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize South Asian society at large, we will focus on specific features of Indian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

India is the birthplace of one of the world's oldest civilizations. At the geographical crossroads of other great societies to the East and West, India's history has been shaped by both internal and external events and influences. India is a diverse society characterized by multiple languages, traditions, and beliefs. This pluralism enabled the country to survive and grow through various empires, colonization, and division and to thrive in the modern era of democracy.

Prehistoric India

Archaeologists trace the first human presence in India to between 400,000-200,000 years ago. Relying initially on hunting and gathering for sustenance, small societies eventually emerged as inhabitants learned to domesticate plants. These first agriculture-based settlements took root around 7000 BC.

Early History

The Indus Valley Civilization: The first documented civilization in the region emerged in the Indus Valley along the border between present-day India and Pakistan around 2650 BC. Artifacts from the cities of Harappa and Mahenjo-Daro indicate that inhabitants used stone to make seals, bricks, and drainage systems. In addition, inhabitants constructed India's first port at Lothal on the Arabian Sea. Evidence also suggests the Indus Valley Civilization maintained a trade relationship with Mesopotamia, the Western world's "cradle of civilization" in the Middle East. The civilization's decline by 1800 BC was likely due to environmental factors exacerbated by economic and political stresses (Photo: Stone seal from 2600-1900 BC).

The Vedic Period: Some 300 years later, Aryans from Central Asia migrated east and south into the Indus Valley. Entering India as a semi-nomadic society of herders, the Aryans soon adopted elements of the cultures and practices of the peoples they conquered. The Aryans gradually moved east into the Ganges Valley in present-day northern India.

This period's name is derived from ***Vedas***, the Sanskrit (India's ancient literary and liturgical language – see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) word for "knowledge." The *Vedas* (see "Myth" below) refers to a set of texts from this period describing everyday life, religion and worship, and societal roles within the caste system (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). By the end of the period, 5 prominent northern kingdoms emerged. Of note, Siddhartha Gautama and Vardhamana Mahavira established Buddhism and Jainism, respectively, at the end of the Vedic Period (see p. 5-8 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

The Persians and Alexander the Great: By 520 BC, Persians from the region of modern-day Iran controlled much of northwest India. In 326 BC, Alexander the Great from Greece led an invasion force that defeated the Persians. After just 2 years in India, Alexander departed, leaving the spoils of his victory in the hands of appointed leaders. Soon, these leaders lost their hold, making way for Chandragupta Maurya's (ruler of Magadha – 1 of the 5 Vedic kingdoms) takeover of the region in 321 BC.

The Mauryan Empire

Chandragupta Maurya became the founder of India's first great empire of Mauryan. His son Bindabura and his grandson Ashoka greatly expanded the empire's reach eastward and southward. At its peak, between 260-232 BC, the Mauryan Empire covered a vast territory from present-day Afghanistan in the West to the present-day Indian state of Assam in the East and from Kashmir in the North to the city of Mysore in India's South. Profoundly affected by the violence and destruction required to extend the empire, Bindabura and Ashoka converted to the non-violent religions of Jainism and Buddhism, respectively (Photo: Mauryan coins).

Ashoka: Widely acknowledged as one of India's greatest rulers, Ashoka left his mark across the empire. In addition to erecting stone pillars etched with moral teachings on peace, tolerance, and charity, Ashoka constructed ***stupas***, monuments to hold sacred Buddhist relics (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The Mauryan Empire gradually declined after Ashoka's death (Photo: Ashoka pillar in Bihar).

Events in Southern India: Meanwhile, events outside the Mauryan Empire followed their own course. In southern India, groups of people called the Dravidians – believed to be the indigenous peoples who had been displaced by the Aryans – struggled for control. Their Andhra dynasty began to consolidate its hold in what are today the states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra in the middle of the subcontinent. Concurrently, the Chera, Pandya, and Chola kingdoms developed in the Southwest, South, and Southeast, respectively. Infighting among these kingdoms during the 1st-century BC greatly weakened their resilience to outside threats.

The "Dark Ages"

Following the Mauryan Empire's collapse, India experienced a prolonged series of invasions and migrations by different Central Asian groups into India's Northwest. Although this era is sometimes known as the "Dark Ages," Indian civilization flourished. Thriving cities emerged, while trade and cultural ties developed across land and sea. During this period, the "Silk Road" from the Mediterranean Sea to China developed, further strengthening India's trade ties to East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

The Gupta Dynasty

Led by Chandra Gupta, the ancient Vedic kingdom of Magadha reemerged around 319 AD, ushering in a new era of artistic expression and bourgeoning overseas trade. Historians commonly refer to the Gupta Dynasty as India's "classical period" due to its achievements in art, literature, religion, and education.

The Guptas ruled their vast empire through a tributary system. Under this system, local leaders exercised a high degree of autonomy in exchange for collecting tribute from their subjects and submitting it to government leaders at higher levels. Some characteristics of this system are still reflected in Indian society today, particularly at the village level.

The Guptas' eventual decline was expedited by Hun invaders from Central Asia. Political control reverted to local and regional leaders until 606 when Harsha Vadhana managed to consolidate political power from his capital at Kanauj.

The Rise and Fall of Small Kingdoms

Between 600-1300, both northern and southern India saw the rise and fall of a number of kingdoms. In the North the Rajputs eventually emerged as the dominant force, ruling from Kanauj for about 200 years. In subsequent years, Rajput kingdoms proliferated in northern areas, while other non-Rajput kingdoms emerged in the Southeast, Northwest, Northeast, and in Kashmir in the far North. Frequent fighting among these kingdoms heightened their vulnerability to external attacks, which eventually brought their decline. Meanwhile, in the South, the Cholas eventually emerged victorious over other kingdoms, representing a reemergence of that ancient kingdom (Photo: Late Chola-period temple in Tamil Nadu state).

During this period, trade expanded greatly, encompassing China, the Malay peninsula, the islands of Java and Sumatra, and mainland Southeast Asia. The Hindu religion evolved as sages and so-called "saint-poets" traveled the land advocating religious devotion and criticizing ancient Vedic ideas and practices such as the caste system. Of note, Arab armies and traders first brought Islam to India during this period (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Raiders from Abroad: Mahmud of Ghazni, leader of a Muslim kingdom in Central Asia exploited the vulnerabilities created by infighting among the Rajput and non-Rajput kingdoms in the North. Raiding the region between 1000 and 1027, Mahmud

eventually conquered the Indian kingdoms, stripping temples and monuments of their wealth and treasures.

Some 200 years later the northern kingdoms fell to Muhammad of Ghor, leader of a Muslim empire centered in present-day Afghanistan. Although an Indian alliance eventually overcame Muhammad in 1191, he returned the following year and enjoyed a decisive victory over the Rajputs.

The Delhi Sultanate

Following Muhammad's assassination in 1206, Qutbu'd-Din Aibak took over administration of the conquered Indian territories. Aibak's ascension ushered in the Delhi Sultanate, which survived for 320 years (until 1526). This era was particularly significant because Islam, the religion of the sultans (leaders), replaced Hinduism as the religion of regional rulers.

The sultanate expanded under Aibak's successors, and by 1246, it had become a strong, stable empire able to repel sustained attacks from invading Mongols. Aibak's dynasty ended in 1287, and a subsequent dynasty expanded the empire to the East. Mongol invaders sacked Delhi twice before the sultanate rallied to defeat them. Following the Mongol defeat, the sultanate expanded to the West and South.

The Delhi Sultanate reached its greatest territorial extent under the Tughluq dynasty between 1320 and 1413. When residents revolted against the high taxes required to sustain the empire and its expansion, the weakened sultanate was unable to withstand the growing influence of a rival Hindu kingdom. When a Delhi sultan's death sparked a succession crisis in 1398, the notorious Central Asian warlord Timur (also known as Tamerlane) sacked Delhi, further weakening the sultanate (Illustration: A late 16th century depiction of Timur's sacking of Delhi).

Subsequent dynasties managed to resuscitate the sultanate somewhat over the next 100 years. The Delhi Sultanate's slow demise finally ended with its defeat by Timur's grandson, Babur of Kabul, Afghanistan in 1526.

The Mughal Empire

What came to be known as the Mughal Empire began when Babur invaded and took control of the Punjab, a geographical region comprising territories in modern day eastern Pakistan and northern India in 1526. After several decades of gaining, losing, and regaining territories, Mughal leader Akbar defeated the Raijputs, extending the empire from Kandahar, Afghanistan to the Bay of Bengal on India's southeastern coast by 1605.

Although the Mughals were a Muslim dynasty, Akbar and some of his successors were famously tolerant of all religions (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). For example, Akbar abolished policies instituted by his predecessors that discriminated against other religions, such as taxes on non-Muslims and fees associated with Hindu pilgrimages. In 1565, Akbar began construction of the famous Agra Fort and moved the empire's capital away from Delhi.

Unlike previous Islamic rulers, the Mughals made India their home, expanding the empire and contributing significantly to its arts and architecture. After assuming the emperorship in 1628, Shah Jahan moved the capital back to Delhi and built the world famous Taj Mahal in Agra (pictured with US Army Paratrooper in the foreground) as a testament to his love for his wife. Under Shah Jahan, the Mughal Empire faced a new military threat from the Marathas, Hindus from central India. Shah Jahan dispatched his son Aurangzeb to deal with the threat. Upon Aurangzeb's return, paternal favoritism and sibling rivalry compelled him to imprison his father at Agra Fort, where Shah Jahan died in 1666.

Within the empire's territories, Aurangzeb reinstituted policies that favored Islam over Hinduism and other religions. Aurangzeb spent the rest of his long reign trying to subdue the Marathas and further expand the empire by force. As the last great Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb gained control of most of the Indian peninsula. Upon Aurangzeb's death at age 88, his son assumed the throne but ruled only 5 years before his death in 1712.

Gradually, the Mughal Empire declined. In 1738, the Marathas regrouped and retook key territories, while Nadir Shah of Persia (Iran) sacked Delhi in 1739 and conquered the Mughals once and for all. The Mughal Empire left a lasting influence on India's art, culture, and religious diversity.

The Arrival of the Europeans

Meanwhile, elsewhere in India, Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama had arrived on the southwest Indian coast in 1498, ushering in a long era of European activity on the subcontinent. Soon, Dutch, English, French, and Danish merchants and traders were establishing trading posts throughout the region.

The British East India Company

In 1600, the British government chartered the British East India Company (EIC) to facilitate trade between Britain and the subcontinent, buying commodities such as cotton, silk, indigo, tea, and opium. As the EIC expanded, it formed its own armies.

In 1757, the EIC military forces engaged the ruler of the far-eastern state of West Bengal and his French allies at the Battle of Plassey near Calcutta. With its victory, the EIC established Britain's military and political supremacy over large areas of Indian territory.

Britain's economy benefitted greatly from the export of Indian raw materials back to Britain and the addition of the Indian market as a new destination for manufactured goods. The benefits to India were less clear: Indians resented the exploitation of their resources for British gain and the new competition from British merchants that threatened native industries. Indians also disliked English becoming the official language and banning of certain traditional practices and customs (Illustration: A British viceroy visits Kashmir in 1860).

Tensions culminated in a violent uprising in 1857. While the British dubbed the event the "Indian Mutiny" or "Sepoy Rebellion," the Indians called it "The First War of Indian Independence." After suppression of the rebellion, Britain's

Queen Elizabeth I dissolved EIC and annexed India as a formal British colony. With this move, she ushered in a period of British colonial control known as the British ***Raj*** or "rule" that would continue until 1947.

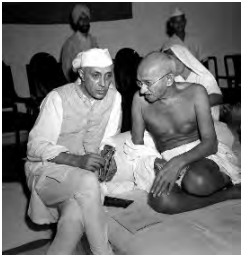
The British Raj

The British Raj produced both positive and negative outcomes for Indians. The British greatly improved the colony's infrastructure by constructing railroads, implementing effective irrigation systems, and building quality educational institutions. Despite these advances, Indians became second class citizens as British nationals held the highest posts in the governmental bureaucracy. Furthermore, the British implemented policies that undermined Indian cultural practices and imposed burdensome taxation schemes. Moreover, with its "divide and rule" strategy, the British exploited religious divisions between Hindus and Muslims to prevent unity and maintain their hold on power.

The Indian National Congress

Beginning in the mid-19th century, a group of young mostly European-educated Indians harnessed growing nationalist sentiment to advocate for Indian autonomy. In response to protests and demonstrations, the British allowed the formation of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885. By the 1920s, Jawaharlal Nehru led the INC, which identified self-governance and eventual independence from Britain as its chief objectives.

Mahatma Gandhi: Nehru's mentor Mohandas K. Gandhi became the most visible leader of the independence movement. Eventually given the affectionate term ***Mahatma*** or "Great Soul," Gandhi advocated for peaceful resistance as the moral and most effective way to achieve the movement's goals. He also vocally opposed the atrocities of the caste system and advocated the human rights of the "downtrodden" (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*)



(Photo: Gandhi,right, with Nehru in 1942).

Gandhi also called for national unity to counter the British "divide and rule" policies. Despite Gandhi's commitment to non-violence, some of his demonstrations met violent ends. For example, the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh Massacre resulted in more than 1,500 casualties when the British opened fire on unarmed protestors.

The All-India Muslim League

With Hindus controlling the INC, Muslims formed the All-India Muslim League in the early 20th century so as to maintain some political power. Led by Muhammad Jinnah, the League advocated the protection and advancement of Indian Muslims' civil rights (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and played a key role in the struggle for India' independence. The Muslim League subsequently became the primary political party in newly-independent Pakistan (Photo: Jinnah and Gandhi in 1944).

India during World War II

As a British possession, India sent 2.5 million soldiers to fight alongside the Allies in World War II. Anti-British sentiment grew in India during the war as Indians watched their fathers, sons, and brothers fight and die in pursuit of Western goals while remaining second-class citizens under the Raj.

By 1940, Muslim League leader Jinnah became concerned about Hindu dominance within the INC and the status of Muslims in what would inevitably be a Hindu-majority independent India. Consequently, his demand for a separate Muslim state became a condition for his continued support for the subcontinent's independence from Britain.

During the war, the Muslim League largely supported the British war effort and gained support on the subcontinent. In 1942, Gandhi launched a civil disobedience movement known as the "Quit India" movement that demanded the British withdraw from India. In response, British government imprisoned several prominent INC leaders and held them for the duration of the war.

Meanwhile, independence agitator Subhas Chandra Bose sought support from Nazi Germany and then collaborated with the Japanese to establish the Indian National Army (INA) in 1942. Comprised primarily of Indian prisoners of war captured by the Japanese, the INA fought alongside the Imperial Japanese army against the British and allied forces in Southeast Asia.

Independence and Partition

Following the war, the British decided that withdrawal from the subcontinent was in their best interests, although the INC and the Muslim League were unable to reach a power-sharing agreement. On August 15, 1947 through what came to be known as the partition of India, the British Raj became 2 independent states, Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.

The Hindustan Times

INDIA INDEPENDENT : BRITISH RULE ENDS

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TAKES OVER

India and Pakistan scrambled to win the allegiance of more than 500 autonomous “princely states” to include the northern region of Kashmir (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*). Goa, a Portuguese enclave on India’s west coast, remained unmentioned in the resolution. This transitional period saw waves of violence as millions of Muslims and Hindus migrated from India to Pakistan and vice-versa. Approximately 500,000 people died and millions were displaced during this period (Pictured: The Hindustan Times announces Indian independence in August, 1947).

Newly-Independent India

After partition, INC leader Nehru was elected as India’s first Prime Minister (PM), remaining in office for over 16 years. Just 1 year after independence, Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist who believed Gandhi had been too supportive of the Muslim cause during the independence struggle. In 1950, India adopted a constitution that officially established it as a democracy – the world’s largest.

War with China: In 1962, India suffered a humiliating military defeat when China invaded its northern border regions. The War of 1962 ended with unresolved borders and residual boundary disputes that continue to periodically disrupt relations (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Wars with Pakistan: Between 1947 and 1999, India and Pakistan fought 4 wars over the status of the northern region of Kashmir. The first 2 conflicts ended in uneasy ceasefires with each country occupying disputed territories. The 3rd war in 1971 erupted when lingering tensions from partition prompted East Pakistan to secede from Pakistan. With support from India, East Pakistan defeated Pakistan, emerging from the conflict as the independent country of Bangladesh (Photo: Indian soldiers in historical dress).

In 1972, India and Pakistan established the Line of Control (LOC) as a temporary demarcation of each country's claims on Kashmir. In 1974, India defied the international community by testing nuclear weapons. Pakistan followed suit in 1998 after India's second test, the latter having lasting consequences for India's relationship with the US and other major powers.

The latest India-Pakistani conflict was in 1999. Known as the Kargil War, the conflict began when Pakistani forces crossed the LOC and occupied India-held territory. India fought back while the rest of the world held its breath at the possibility of escalation between 2 nuclear states. Pakistan eventually withdrew largely as a result of US and international pressure to honor the LOC.

The Nehru-Gandhi Legacy

Following Nehru's death in 1964, political stability was elusive as 1 PM died in office and another served 2 terms for just a few days each. In 1966, Nehru's daughter and INC leader, Indira Gandhi (no relation to the Mahatma), came to power as India's 1st female PM. During her initial years in office, Mrs. Gandhi centralized governmental power and led India through its 2 wars with Pakistan described above.

Mrs. Gandhi's popularity plummeted in 1975 following her conviction for electoral fraud. Nevertheless, she remained in office and in response instituted a 2-year state of emergency. During this period, the government suspended civil rights and freedom of the press, incarcerated Mrs. Gandhi's political opponents, and implemented martial law. It further enacted coercive sterilization programs to curb population growth among the poor (Photo: PM Gandhi with US President Nixon in 1971).

In 1977 elections, Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party suffered a resounding loss as the Janata Alliance of opposition parties took power. Its success was short-lived, however, when Mrs. Gandhi was swept back into power in the 1980 elections. She continued her policies of democratic socialism and social justice but was preoccupied somewhat with growing secessionist sentiment in the northwest state of Punjab.

In 1983, Punjabi terrorists seeking a Sikh-majority state barricaded themselves in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs' holiest shrine (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Mrs. Gandhi ordered a military response, which resulted in the temple's damage and civilian deaths. In retaliation, Mrs. Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards assassinated her in 1984.

In December of that year, Mrs. Gandhi's son, Rajiv, took office as PM. During his almost 5 years in office, he pursued more liberal economic policies that encouraged scientific and technological development. He also improved the relationship with the US, which had faltered when his mother earlier sought to strengthen ties with the Soviet Union (USSR – Russia today). In 1989 elections, the INC and PM Rajiv suffered a major defeat due to accusations of corruption. In the midst of his campaign to return to power in 1991, Rajiv was assassinated by Tamil extremists who objected to his policies regarding the Tamil-Sinhalese civil war in Sri Lanka.

Modern India

Despite Rajiv's assassination, the INC won the 1991 elections and Narasimha Rao became PM. Rao instituted a number of liberal economic reforms, which resulted in double-digit growth at the end of the decade. The INC dynasty ended when a coalition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or Indian People's Party (emerged from the Janata Alliance), won the 1998 election. Later that year, India conducted another nuclear test (with Pakistan again following suit), causing global outrage and resulting in international sanctions (see P. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

In 2004, the INC led the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition in defeating the BJP. New PM Manmohan Singh focused on economic reform with the aim of lifting the country's population out of poverty and making India a major regional player. His legacy also includes a 2008 US-India civilian nuclear agreement that separates India's civil and military nuclear facilities, placing civil facilities under international observation. This act demonstrated Singh's political prowess while highlighting the increasing influence of coalition politics in India (see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Narendra Modi: Although the Singh government won reelection in 2009, the INC was ousted in April 2014 elections. The vote brought the BJP back to power with Narendra Modi as PM. Modi's rise came as somewhat of a surprise to those who accused him of tolerating if not inflaming sectarian violence in 2002 (see p. 9 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Modi's role during that episode caused the US to label him a persona non grata (unwelcome person) and revoke his US visa until a few weeks before he was elected PM. Despite this controversy, Modi remains popular, particularly among Indians living in the US. They congregated in record numbers to welcome him at Madison Square Garden for his first official visit to the US in 2014 (Photo: Then-President Obama greets a crowd in India with then-President Pranab Mukharjee and PM Modi in 2015).

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Hindu mythology provides a foundation for the religious beliefs and practices of most Indians. Hindu and other myths are reflected in contemporary Indian social structure, popular culture, military customs, and even foreign policy.

The *Vedas* and the *Puranas*

Some of India's oldest texts, the *Vedas* relate the roots of India's mythical and religious traditions. The *Vedas* include Hindu stories of early gods such as Indra, Agni (the god of fire), and Surya (the sun-god), and information regarding their worship. Considered sacred Hindu literature (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the *Puranas* is a later collection of ancient texts that tell of the universe's creation, its periodic annihilation and re-creation, and the genealogy of the Hindu gods, among other topics.

India's Great Epics

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, India's great epic poems, are also sacred Hindu texts. Within the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita* narrative tells of a great battle where Prince Arjuna faces a moral dilemma: his duties as a warrior require him to fight family members. During the battle, Aruna engages in philosophical discussions regarding morality with his charioteer, who is the Hindu deity Lord Krishna in disguise. Eventually Arjun comes to terms with the concept of ***dharma***, the virtuous behaviors, duties, and customs that underlie social order.

The *Ramayana* relates the quest of the hero Rama (illustrated), who aided by his brother and the monkey god Hanuman, must rescue his wife Sita, who has been kidnapped by the demon king Ravana. Indians celebrate Rama's successful recovery of Sita – and the symbolic triumph of good over evil – during the Hindu festival of Diwali (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Republic of India
Bhārat Gaṇarājya

Political Borders
Coastline: 4,847 mi
Burma: 912 mi
Bangladesh: 2,574 mi
China: 1,652 mi
Bhutan: 409 mi
Nepal: 1,100 mi
Pakistan: 1,982 mi

Capital
New Delhi

Demographics
India has a population of about 1.33 billion, making it the world's 2nd most populous country after China. The population is growing at a rate of 1.1% annually, similar to rates in the Middle East and the rest of South Asia. When compared to the US, India is densely populated, having 4 times the US population yet only 1/3rd of the land area (about the size of Texas and Oklahoma combined). However, population density is high only in urban areas even though 65% of Indians live in rural areas, giving India the world's largest rural population of about 862 million people.

Flag
The Indian flag consists of 3 horizontal bands of saffron, white, and green, with a blue ***chakra*** (wheel with 24 spokes) centered in the middle band. The ***chakra*** represents both the movement of life and the stillness of death. Saffron symbolizes courage, sacrifice, and renunciation or disinterest in material gain. White represents truth and purity, while the green stands for fertility and faith.

Geography

Dominating the South Asian subcontinent, India borders China, Bhutan, and Nepal to the Northeast, Bangladesh and Burma to the East, and Pakistan to the Northwest. Two-thirds of India's landmass forms a peninsula that extends into the Indian Ocean, bordering the Arabian Sea in the Southwest and Bay of Bengal in the Southeast. India also includes the Lakshadweep Islands in the Arabian Sea and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. With a total land area of 1,270,000 sq mi, India is Asia's 3rd and the world's 7th largest country.

The towering Himalayan mountain range lies in the country's North, bordering China, Bhutan, and Nepal. At 28,169 ft, India's highest point is the Himalayan peak Kangchenjunga, also the world's 3rd highest mountain. South of the Himalayas is the fertile Indo-Gangetic Plain along the Ganges River. The plains become the Great Indian Desert when reaching the western border with Pakistan. The Deccan Plateau in the South lies between the Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats, hill regions along the respective coasts (Photo: US and Indian Army personnel celebrate reaching the summit of the Himalayan Machoi Peak).

Climate

India experiences varied climate and weather, from the snow-capped Himalayas in the North to the tropical South. While the plains have a more temperate climate, the South experiences distinct wet and dry seasons. Winter, which is relatively dry and cool, runs from December-February. The period from March-May is typically dry and hot, while June-September brings the warm, humid, and rainy monsoon season. The retreating monsoons last from October-November. Temperatures in the North typically range from 32°F-76°F, while the South averages 80°F throughout the year. New Delhi typically experiences temperatures between 58°F-92°F. Of note, India frequently experiences periods of intense heat. The May 2015 heatwave was particularly intense with temperatures over 116°F and more than 1,000 deaths in Andhra Pradesh alone.

Natural Hazards

India is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, including monsoons, cyclones (known as a typhoon or hurricane in other parts of the world), drought, earthquakes, and landslides. In the South, monsoonal rains often overwhelm the capacity of rivers, causing flooding and landslides. In 2013, heavy rainfall and landslides in Uttrakhand flooded hundreds of villages, damaging infrastructure, trapping 1 million pilgrims, and killing 5,700 people. In the absence of monsoonal rains, drought is a pervasive problem, particularly in northwestern and eastern India. Coastal regions are vulnerable to cyclones, while mountainous northern India is prone to earthquakes and landslides. In 2001, India suffered one of its deadliest earthquakes, killing about 20,000 people.

Environmental Issues

Rapid economic growth and urbanization following India's 1947 independence have resulted in serious air, water, and land pollution. Air pollution caused by industry and car emissions is a serious problem: at least 1.2 million premature deaths are blamed on poor air quality across the country as a whole. Further, the widespread use of chemicals and fertilizers in agricultural production contaminates groundwater. Deforestation and the resulting loss of biodiversity occur as land is cleared to produce crops for both export and domestic demand (Photo: Land cultivation in eastern India).

Government

India has a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 28 states, administered by local governments, and 8 union (federal) territories, controlled by the federal government. Similar to the US, Indian states are largely autonomous with laws varying from state to state. Originally adopted in 1950, India's constitution is one of the world's longest having 395 articles and more than 90 amendments. In detail, it outlines the structure of government, the fundamental rights of Indian citizens, and distinguishes between federal and state responsibilities.

Executive Branch

The constitution vests executive power in the President (currently Ram Nath Kovind since July 2017) as chief-of-state and commander of the armed forces. The President in turn delegates almost all executive authority to the Prime Minister (PM – currently Narendra Modi since 2014), the Indian equivalent to the US President. The PM forms and leads the Council of Ministers (cabinet) and is head-of-government. The PM is chosen by the majority party in Parliament's lower house and is formally appointed by the President.

By contrast, the President is elected by an electoral college of members from both the Parliament and state legislatures. Presidential powers are mostly limited to ceremonial purposes, except in times of emergency when direct presidential rule can be imposed over poorly functioning state governments (Photo: Then-President Obama speaks with PM Modi in the Oval Office).

Legislative Branch

India's legislature is a 2-chamber Parliament, consisting of a 545-seat ***Lok Sabha*** (House of the People or lower house) and 245-seat ***Rajya Sabha*** (Council of States or upper house). Serving 5-year terms, 543 members of the *Lok Sabha* are elected directly by the people through majority representation, while 2 are appointed by the President.

While 233 members of the *Rajya Sabha* are elected by state and federal legislatures, the remaining 12 are selected by the President. *Rajya Sabha* members serve staggered 6-year terms, so 1/3rd of them are up for election every 2 years. Both houses together are responsible for making laws, approving government expenditures, and representing the interests of the Indian people. The lower house alone enjoys certain special powers such as introducing finance legislation, holding responsibility for the Council of Ministers, and initiating a confidence/no-confidence motion regarding the PM.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a federal Supreme Court, high state courts, and low (district) courts. As the highest court, the Supreme Court has the power to constitutionally review all laws, settle disputes between state courts, and hear appeals from lower courts. At the state level, high courts determine the constitutionality of state laws and serve as courts of appeal to the state's lower courts. The President appoints the 26 Supreme Court justices, who typically serve until age 65.

Political Climate

Although India has many active political parties, 2 large coalitions dominate political life: the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The UPA is led by the liberal Indian National Congress (INC) (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), the dominant force in politics since India's independence.

INC's platform has traditionally supported liberal economic policies aiming to reduce government deficits and poverty. It also encourages equal rights for all citizens, including those in marginalized castes (see "Social Relations" below). The INC is currently led by Rahul Gandhi, son of Sonia Gandhi and ex-PM Rajiv Gandhi, and grandson of ex-PM Indira Gandhi (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: Sonia Gandhi with then-US Secretary of State Clinton in 2009).

The more conservative NDA coalition, which currently holds the majority of Parliament's lower house seats, is led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Known for its Hindu nationalist ideology, the BJP opposes the INC's liberal policies and has instead traditionally supported social conservatism, privatization, free markets, and foreign investment. Of note, some leaders of BJP are members of the extreme right wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an organization that advocates a staunch Hindu nationalistic agenda. Intolerant of religious minorities, the RSS occasionally has received sanctions for inciting communal violence.

Members of dozens of other parties also hold seats in Parliament. These parties may promote a certain state's or region's interests, endorse a particular political ideology, or support the goals of an ethnic or religious group (see "Ethnic Groups" and p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Political parties often enter into alliances in an effort to further their agendas but are known to break them if the collaboration is not fruitful.

Dubbed "coalition politics," this trend is becoming more significant as single parties struggle to gather the majority vote. Political discussion primarily centers on economic issues and the societal divisions that spring from religious, caste, ethnic, language, and geographic differences.

Another trend in Indian politics is the increasing intolerance within the electorate for corruption among political leaders. Dissatisfied for decades by bribery, graft, and even violent crime, a grassroots movement emerged under legislator Anna Hazare in 2011. Hazare traveled across India for months garnering support for the anti-corruption Jan Lok Pal (Citizens' Ombudsman) bill. This legislation establishes an independent investigative body to explore all allegations of political corruption. The bill passed both houses of Parliament in December 2013.

Defense

The Indian Armed Forces (IAF) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches. With 1,458,500 active duty troops and 1,155,000 reserves, India has the 2nd largest armed forces in the world, behind China and the US. To alleviate pressing security threats with neighboring Pakistan and China (see "Security" below), India is investing in technology and equipment to modernize and strengthen all 3 branches.

In addition to responding to external threats, the IAF are responsible for supporting disaster relief efforts, combating internal terrorism and insurgency, and safeguarding India's energy reserves and critical infrastructure (Photo: Indian soldier during a joint US-India exercise).

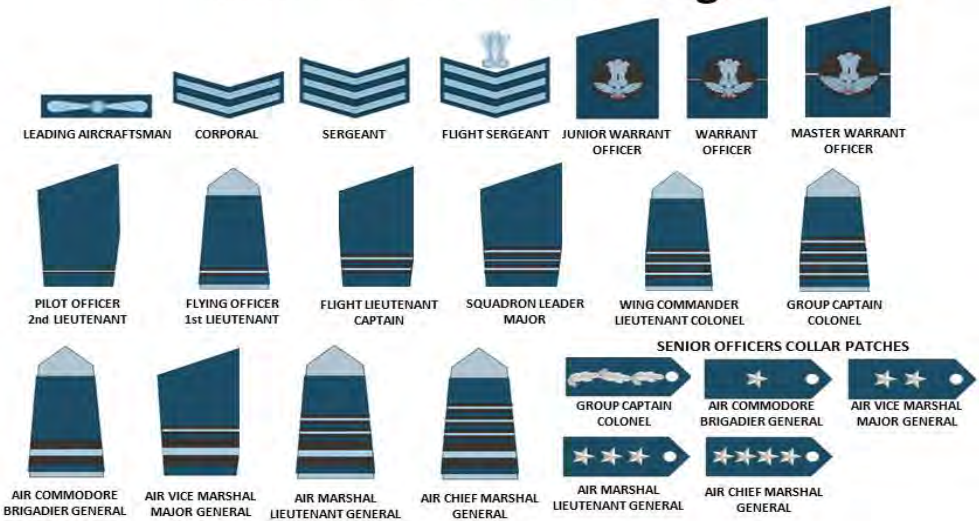
Notably, India is one of 9 nations along with the US, Russia, China, the UK, France, Israel, Pakistan, and North Korea possessing nuclear warheads. India regularly participates in numerous arms and joint-services exercises with the US, the UK, France, and Singapore, among others. India is also one of the largest providers of troops for United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations.

Army: The Indian Army is a well-equipped, well-trained force of 1,237,000 active-duty troops. It has 6 regional commands (Northern, Western, Central, Southern, Eastern, South Western), 1 training command, 8 special forces units, 70 maneuver divisions and brigades (including armored, mechanized, light, air maneuver, mountain, and aviation), and 17 combat support divisions and brigades (Photo: An Indian Army physical fitness instructor leads US Army soldiers in a yoga pose).

Navy: Consisting of 69,050 active-duty personnel, the Indian Navy is a well-equipped force headquartered in New Delhi, with commands located in Mumbai, Vishakhapatnam, Kochi, and Port Blair. The Navy has 15 tactical submarines, 48 surface combatants, roughly 100 patrol and coastal combatants, over 60 logistics and support vessels, and substantial naval aviation equipment.

Air Force: The Indian Air Force consists of 139,850 active-duty personnel, with 5 regional commands in New Delhi (western), Gandhinagar (southwestern), Shillong (eastern), Allahabad (central), Trivandrum (southern) and 2 support commands. As of 2016, the Air Force had roughly 600 fixed-wing combat aircraft and over 100 fixed- and rotary-wing squadrons (Photo: US and Indian Air Force personnel discuss airborne warning systems).

Indian Air Force Rank Insignia



Security Issues

India's security concerns are dominated by long-standing disputes with neighboring Pakistan and China, prompting India to invest in and strengthen its military forces. Other pressing security issues are unrest and violent insurgencies in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and Burma.

Internal security is also a challenge. Terrorism stemming from both secular ideological groups and radical religious sects has increased in recent years. With close to 29,000 incidents recorded from 2000 to 2010, ethnic and Maoist insurgents, right-wing Hindu extremists, and Pakistan-based radical Islamic groups pose the greatest threats.

India and Pakistan: Despite strong historical, cultural, and linguistic ties (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), India has an antagonistic relationship with Pakistan. Both countries claim territory in Jammu and Kashmir, India's northern state along the Pakistan border. India considers this Muslim-majority state as vital to its national identity. Pakistan considers the region an essential component of the South Asian Muslim community and thus rightfully a part of Pakistan. This dispute has been the main source of conflict between the 2 nations since 1947 (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: US Army personnel training at the Indian Army's High Altitude Warfare School in Jammu and Kashmir in 2013).

Over recent decades, the countries have experienced wars, conflicts, and military standoffs along the border. Although a 2003 ceasefire remains in place, terrorist violence in Kashmir continues, with each side accusing the other of enflaming hostilities. Relations further soured in 2008 when a Pakistan-based terrorist attack occurred in Mumbai on India's western coast, far from the Kashmir violence. Despite peace talks in 2011 and 2014, hope for long-term peace has unraveled following recent violence in Kashmir – some of the worst since the 2003 cease-fire agreement.

India and China: India's relationship with China is largely influenced by ongoing border disputes. Both governments agreed to abide by a temporary border that remains ill-defined, causing frequent incursions from both sides. China's longstanding support of Pakistan's claims in the Kashmir conflict and its infrastructure investments in Pakistan also strain relations. Finally, China's growing military and increased regional dominance concern India. Consequently, India closely monitors China's relations with India's other neighbors and its inroads into India's sphere of influence, especially in the Indian Ocean.

Despite these issues, China-India relations have improved. Several territorial disputes have been settled, including those over Tibet and the northern Indian state of Sikkim. Since 2003, China and India have successfully rebuilt economic and diplomatic ties. However, in early 2017, the two countries clashed at the Doklam plateau along the disputed Sino-Bhutanese border. Despite making little progress toward a fully demarcated border, both nations' leaders have expressed optimism (Photo: The Indian border with China's Tibet Autonomous Region at Nathu La in Sikkim state).

Foreign Relations

Since its independence, India has pursued a policy of "non-alignment," avoiding formal alliances with any major power. During the Cold War, India was able to procure military and economic aid from the Soviet Union while still maintaining neutral relations with Western states. Today, India leads the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an organization of 120 member countries that advocates peaceful, multilateral cooperation between developing and developed nations.

Because of its expanding economy, growing military strength, and geostrategic location, India is influential in regional and international affairs. To strengthen its economic and diplomatic position, India is pursuing strategic partnerships with major powers, including the US, Russia, China, Japan, and the EU.

Regional Cooperation: India engages with a number of multilateral bodies and organizations in pursuit of regional stability. As part of its "Act East" strategy, India is forging relationships with the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is also an active participant in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which promotes economic and political cooperation among South Asian nations. Further, India regularly holds summits with the "BRICS" (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) – a group of influential, newly-industrialized nations with rapidly growing economies (Photo: Indian soldiers during multinational exercises).

In 2012 India unveiled a "Connect Central Asia" (CCA) policy, a multi-level framework to promote regional security and connect South and Central Asian nations politically, economically, and culturally. Finally, India is also an active member of the UN and is currently seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Relations with Afghanistan: India has long supported a stable and independent Afghanistan. In 2011, the 2 nations entered into a strategic partnership, with India agreeing to support training and building capacity initiatives for the Afghan National Security Forces. In 2014, India continued its support of Afghan forces, negotiating a deal with Russia to supply military equipment to Afghan troops. Analysts predict future cooperation could include intelligence sharing, recruitment, and communication and logistics to help maintain Afghanistan's national security.

Relations with the Russia: Besides a defense partnership, India and Russia enjoy strong diplomatic and economic ties. After forming a Strategic Partnership in 2000, both nations have engaged in joint military exercises and invested in the development of military and nuclear technology. Both nations also seek to substantially increase bilateral trade by 2025.

Relations with the US: India views the US as a strategic partner. The nations share interests in strengthening economic ties and combating terrorism, organized crime, and maritime piracy in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. Prior to the end of the Cold War, relations were strained due to India's close association with the NAM and its ties to the Soviet Union. Since 1991, India and the US have engaged in a number of dialogues and agreements which have led to close cooperation between Indian and US militaries and forged strong economic alliances.

In 1998 relations suffered a setback when India openly tested nuclear weapons directly against the provisions outlined in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which strictly controls the use of nuclear technology. Because India never signed the NPT and acted outside of its regulatory structure, the US imposed economic sanctions and suspended strategic negotiations with India.

Despite these tensions, dialogue resumed less than 2 years later. Of note in 2006, the US passed the United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act, which facilitates peaceful nuclear trade between the 2 countries. Negotiations are underway regarding India possibly purchasing nuclear reactors and fuel from the US (Photo: Then-US Secretary of State Kerry co-chaired the 5th US-India Strategic Dialogue in 2014).

Today, India and the US enjoy cordial bilateral ties. The annually recurring US-India Strategic Dialogue, first launched in 2009, provides the opportunity for the 2 nations to continually strengthen ties and address broad concerns such as trade, energy, terrorism, education, and climate change. The 5th annual meeting was held in 2014, during which India and the US agreed on a new 10-year cooperative defense framework. It includes military education partnership, joint investment in technology, and deeper maritime cooperation.

Ethnic Groups

India is one of the world's most diverse countries where language, religion, race, and cultural background frequently cross ethnic lines. Consequently, it is more effective to analyze India in terms of specific regional, linguistic, religious, or caste identities, rather than to attempt to group those identities into ethnicities.

On a broad level, Indian society can be divided into 2 groups: tribal and non-tribal. There are over 570 indigenous or tribal groups, comprising about 9% of India's population. Designated in the constitution as "Scheduled Tribes" (ST), these indigenous groups are also called ***Adivasi***. Members of the STs historically live in remote and sparsely populated areas of the country, including the Northeast, central India, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The largest groups include the Gond people of central India and the Santal of West Bengal (pictured performing a dance). ST members do not have a place in India's caste system (see "Social Relations") and typically hold a low position within the Indian social hierarchy. Many STs are entitled to an array of government affirmative action programs, created to help them overcome years of institutionalized discrimination.

Scholars usually categorize non-tribal Indians by their mother tongue (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*), regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation. The language family with the most speakers in India is the Indo-Aryan group, which comprises 72% of the population and includes Hindi (India's most widely spoken language), Urdu, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Bengali, Kashmiri, Assamese, Oriya, among others. The next largest group comprises speakers of Dravidian languages, accounting for 25% of the population and including Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada, among others. The remaining 3% include speakers of Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic languages.

Social Relations

India has an elaborate, traditional social hierarchy known as the caste system. Individuals are born into a caste with associated occupations, cultural identities, and social expectations. While there are 100s of castes and 1000s of subcastes, they group into 4 main ***varnas***, or groups.

Traditionally at the pinnacle were ***Brahmin***, the priests and intellectuals. Next were the ***Kshatriya***, the soldiers and administrators, followed by the ***Vaishya***, a class of merchants, farmers, and artisans. At the bottom were ***Shudra***, the servants and laborers. Individuals who were not members of a *varna* were known as ***Dalits***, or "downtrodden." Considered outcasts in traditional Indian society, *Dalits* historically performed only the most menial of tasks, including waste removal, leather tanning, and human remains disposal.

Today, members of the traditionally privileged castes, defined in the legal code as "Forward Classes" (FCs) and "Backward Classes" (BCs), generally enjoy greater economic prosperity than those from marginalized castes, legally known as "Scheduled Castes" (SCs). In addition, members of SCs have historically been excluded from certain occupational and educational opportunities. For example, children from marginalized castes were traditionally excluded from elite schools to prevent inter-caste mixing (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*). To combat discrimination, the Indian government implemented numerous affirmative action programs targeting historically disadvantaged groups, including the *Dalits*, SCs, and STs (Photo: Crowds listen to a US Air Force concert in New Delhi).

Indian society is further divided along rural-urban, male-female, and rich-poor lines. Generally, urban dwellers, males, and the wealthy enjoy broader access to educational and economic opportunities and hold more respected positions in society. Stark differences in social freedoms exist for women, many of whom experience high levels of domestic violence and child marriage (see *Sex and Gender*).

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

According to 2017 estimates, roughly 74% of India's population is Hindu, about 14% Muslim, around 6% Christian, and about 2% Sikh. Approximately 3% identify with other religious traditions. India is known for its religious tolerance, which has been a key theme throughout its history. India's religious diversity is reflected in its architecture, festivals, and everyday life.

Even with India's overwhelming Hindu majority, the constitution establishes the country as a "secular republic" with no official religion and guarantees the free exercise of worship (Photo: Hindu priest throwing offerings into a consecrated fire).

Hinduism

Origins of Hinduism

The earliest traces of Hinduism date back to religious practices of the Aryans during the Vedic Period (ca. 1750-500 BC − see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). The pantheon of Vedic gods included elemental deities such as Surya (the sun god) and Agni (the fire god), with Indra as the chief god. The Aryans orally conveyed descriptions of deities, rituals and hymns of worship, and teachings about social structure and behavior in the 4 *Vedas,* which were eventually transcribed over the period 1000 BC-500 AD.

Later sacred writings include the *Brahmana*s, *Upanishads,* the *Dharma Shastras,* and the *Puranas*. These texts advocate guidelines for ***Brahmins*** (priests), outline Hinduism's major tenets and concepts, prescribe social classes (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*), and relate tales of Hindu mythology (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*).

Hinduism spread across the subcontinent as part of the expansion of the Mauryan and Gupta empires (see p. 2-4 of *History and Myth*). Over the centuries, it withstood challenges to its regional preeminence, often evolving in the process.

Concepts in Hinduism

- **Dharma:** the duty to fulfill one's social and spiritual roles in life.
- **Samsara:** what Westerners term "reincarnation;" the cycle of continual birth, death, and rebirth until one is able to break free (***moksha***).
- **Karma:** the concept that one's current circumstances derive from deeds committed in past lives.
- **Varnas:** the system of social hierarchy commonly referred to as caste (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

A Hindu seeks to achieve 3 aims during his life. The first is *dharma*, or duty, in both spiritual and social contexts. Next is ***artha***, or material wealth, and the third is ***kama***, or pleasure.

The Hindu Pantheon

The Hindu pantheon includes hundreds of gods and goddesses. The "greater" gods, are common to most Hindus, while "lesser" gods vary from village to village. Together, the 2 gods ***Vishnu*** (the preserver) and ***Shiva*** (the destroyer) along with ***Brahma*** (the creator) periodically create, destroy, and recreate the world. Generally, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, and ***Mahadevi*** (or ***Devi***), the great goddess, have supreme power and overshadow Brahma in popularity (Photo: Temple devoted to Brahma in Rajasthan).

Many gods and goddesses have so-called avatars or other forms. For example, *Brahma* is also known as ***Rama*** or ***Krishna***, his most famous avatars, while *Shiva* appears as ***Mahadev*** and ***Nataraja***, the "great god" and the god of dance, respectively.

Deities also have partners of the opposite sex, known as consorts, and animal "vehicles" that convey them from place to place. *Brahma's* wife is ***Saraswati***, the most beautiful in the pantheon and the goddess of creativity, learning, and music. *Vishnu's* female partner is ***Lakshmi***, the goddess of wealth, while *Shiva's* consort is ***Parvati***, one of whose avatars is ***Mahadevi***, the great goddess.

Hindu Practices

As Hinduism evolved, rituals shifted from animal sacrifices in open-air venues to more symbolic worship in a temple. Usually dedicated to a particular deity, temples today house shrines where devotees offer flowers and food in return for blessings. In the temple, Brahmin priests act as intercessors between the worshiper and the deity.

At home, the faithful perform ***puja*** (devotion) to their preferred god or gods in much the same way. Hindus also commonly make pilgrimages to holy sites, including temples, caves, rivers, and sacred cities (Photo: A ***deoghar*** or family shrine).

The Hindu calendar abounds with numerous holy days and festivals. Among the most significant and widely celebrated are Holi, the festival of color, which ushers in spring; and Diwali, the festival of lights (see p. 14 of *History and Myth* and p. 2 of *Time and Space*).

Islam

Origins of Islam

Islam dates to the 6th century AD, when Muhammad, whom Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe the Archangel Gabriel visited Muhammad over a 23-year period revealing to him the Qur'an, or "Holy Book."

Muslim Sects: Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunni Muslims are distinguished by their belief that the leader

(***caliph***) of the Muslim community (***ummah***) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the ***caliph*** should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. About 85% of Indian Muslims are Sunni.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as the completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets

Concept of Jihad

The concept of ***jihad***, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with violence and notions of "holy war" that often are associated with the term. Most Muslims strongly oppose terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able are required to fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal. Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar (Photo: The Taj Mahal mosque, constructed by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in 1632).

Origins of Islam in India

Islam first appeared in India in the 7th century AD, brought by Arab traders to the subcontinent's southwestern regions. Islam gained converts during the period of Muslim settlement that gave rise to the Delhi Sultanate (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), when India saw its first Muslim rulers.

The Spread of Islam in India

Islam subsequently spread across India largely through intermarriage and through the efforts of Sufi missionaries, who preached a more mystical version of Islam. The arrival of the Mughals in 1526 (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*) ushered in a golden age for Islam in India. During the Mughal period, Islamic art and architecture flourished under rulers such as Akbar and Shah Jahan, who built the Taj Mahal.

Most of the Mughal emperors were known for their religious tolerance, visible today in Mughal architecture that incorporates symbols and styles from religions besides Islam. The demise of the empire and the presence of the British in India beginning in the 18th century (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*) coincided with a period of revival for India's other religious traditions.

Islam since Independence

The status of Islam and Muslims' civil rights emerged as a key issue during India's mid-20th century independence struggle (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). In 1947, Britain divided its colonial holdings on the subcontinent into 2 independent countries, Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. Although millions of Indian Muslims fled to Pakistan following this partition, many remained behind in India.

Today, about 180 million Muslims live in India, comprising the majority religious group in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*). In addition, significant Muslim populations live in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala (Photo: Cherman Peruma Juma mosque on India's southwest coast).

Other Religions

Buddhism

Origins of Buddhism: India is the birthplace of Buddhism. In the 6th century BC, a prince named Siddartha Gautama became

dissatisfied with Hinduism's explanations of the human condition. Gautama traveled the countryside in search of truth and the meaning of life. He reportedly achieved enlightenment while sitting under a Bodhi tree in what is now Bihar in northern India (Photo: Buddhist pilgrims at the Mahabodhi "Great Awakening" Temple, which marks the location where the Buddha achieved enlightenment).

Buddhist Theology: Gautama, who became known as the "Buddha" (Enlightened One), determined that humans are fated to suffer, that suffering is caused by greed or desire, and can be stopped by following a particular spiritual path that includes unselfish living and meditation.

Aside from these so-called Noble Truths, there are 2 basic laws in Buddhism – the law of causation (similar to the Hindu concept of *karma*) and the law of impermanence, the idea that change is constant (related to the Hindu idea of *samsara*). Given these conditions, the goal of Buddhists is to conquer suffering and achieve ***nirvana*** (*moksha* in Hinduism), a state of peace and unity with the universe.

Although Buddhism, like Hinduism, is based on a voluminous set of scriptures, there is no god or gods in Buddhism. Instead, devotees venerate the Buddha as a god-like figure. Buddhist temples, shrines, and ***stupas*** (Buddhist monuments) abound across India, and many households display small figurines of the Buddha.

Spread of Buddhism in India: In the 3rd-century BC, Ashoka, leader of the Mauryan Empire (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*), embraced Buddhism, erecting stone pillars etched with Buddhist teachings and *stupas* to hold Buddhist relics. Although Buddhism became the most prominent religion in India during the Mauryan Empire, it was displaced by Hinduism. Of note, beginning in the 7th century Buddhism spread to Tibet, where it continued to evolve into the form practiced in northeast India today.

Less than 1% of India's population today or around 10.5 million Indians are Buddhists. While many Indian Buddhists live in the northeastern states bordering Nepal, large populations also live in Maharashtra state on the west coast and Karnataka state in the South. Some Buddhists are refugees from Tibet who fled Chinese persecution. Although Buddhism declined in India, it spread widely and rapidly through Southeast and East Asia. Buddhism's Indian roots have served as a key source of India's cultural and religious connection with other countries having large Buddhist populations, such as China and Thailand.

Sikhism

Sikhism was founded in the 16th century by the poet-philosopher Guru Nanak. Blending elements of both Hinduism and Islam, he preached that *moksha* (emerging from the reincarnation cycle) was attainable for all, regardless of caste or sex. Nanak taught the belief in one supreme God. All other deities were simply different names for the only God. Further, he advocated meditation over ritual as the appropriate path to God. According to Nanak, "God" is actually truth and reveals himself through ***gurus*** or teachers. The city of Amritsar, built by Nanak's successor, is the Sikh holy city. There, the Golden Temple (pictured) houses the Sikh holy book.

Today, the "5 k's" help to designate Sikhs from people of other religious traditions: ***kangha*** (comb), ***kirpan*** (sword), ***kara*** (steel bracelet), ***kachcha*** (shorts), and ***kesh*** (uncut hair). Sikh males typically take the surname Singh (lion) while females take Kaur (princess). Numbering about 25 million, most Indian Sikhs reside in the state of Punjab.

Jainism

Jainism emerged around the same time as Buddhism. Jainism's founder Vardhamana Jnatiputra eventually became known as ***Mahavira*** or "Great Hero." A central focus of Jainism is the concept of ***jiva*** or the soul. The religion also preaches non-violence (***ahimsa***) toward every other *jiva*, which both living and non-living things possess. To live in accordance with *ahimsa*,

devout Jains wear facemasks to avoid inadvertently inhaling insects and carry whisks to wave them out of harm's way. Despite its influence in the modern era (Mahatma Gandhi espoused Jain principles although not a Jain by birth), just 0.4% of India's population (or about 5.1 million residents) identify as Jain today.

Zoroastrianism

Indian Zoroastrians, followers of the religion founded by Persian (Iranian) prophet Zarathustra between 1500-1200 BC, comprise a small fraction of the Indian population today. Zoroastrians first arrived in Sindh and Gujarat as refugees from Muslim conquests. Zorastrianism is a monotheistic religion that focuses on the divide between good and evil and uses fire as a form of worship. Called Parsis in India, most live in the state of Maharashtra and bear no visible outward sign of their faith in dress or behavior. Unlike other religions that mandate burial or cremation upon death, Parsis place their dead in a silo-like structure to be disposed of by vultures.

Christianity

Christianity has ancient roots in India. Some scholars believe that the apostle Thomas arrived in the southwestern state of Kerala in 54 AD. Many ancient Christian traditions still practiced in this region are associated in some way with Thomas, who many believe was martyred 18 years later in Chennai. Christianity spread further with the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th century (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*). Today, there are about 75 million Christians in India. They constitute the majority religious affiliation in the northeastern states of Mizoram (87%), Meghalaya (70%), and Nagaland (90%) (Photo: Early 20th- century Holy Trinity Church at Turkman Gate in Old Delhi).

Religion Today

Hindu-Muslim Relations

In many parts of India, Hindus and Muslims coexist quite peacefully. While they may live in separate neighborhoods, they

often celebrate each other's religious festivals and holidays. Despite this overall calm, underlying nationalist extremism and resentment perpetuate discrimination, inequalities, and even violence in some regions.

In Indian Hindu society, Muslims are often considered to be impure because of their different dietary and ritual practices. Consequently, they often face discrimination. For example, in Gujarat, many Muslims do not have adequate access to basic infrastructure while in Maharashtra they lack equal access to housing. Generally, Muslims in India suffer disparities in income, employment, health, and wealth (Photo: Hindu priests perform a ritual at Bhadrachalam Temple in Telangana state).

Violence between Hindus and Muslims occurs most frequently in the adjoining states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra. In the first 9 months of 2013, 479 incidents took place, killing 107 and injuring 1,647. Serious Hindu-Muslim violence includes a December 1992 incident in which a mob of Hindu extremists destroyed the ancient Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. Because the mosque sat on sacred Hindu land, Hindus had long sought to build a temple on the site. Ensuing riots lasted months and resulted in almost 1,000 deaths, with almost twice as many Muslims killed as Hindus.

Observers alleged that the police did nothing to halt the violence and that the BJP political party (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations)* was guilty of inciting Hindus to take up arms. In 2002, a group of Hindus was killed in an attack on a train in Gujarat, prompting riots and resulting in over 2,000 deaths. BJP politicians, including current PM Modi, were also implicated in this event (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*).

Hindu-Christian Relations

Hindu extremists occasionally seek to prevent conversions to Christianity or compel reconversion to Hinduism. At times, extremists have resorted to violent means, including burning churches and killing would-be converts.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

India's extended family unit serves as a social safety net where individuals receive support in times of need. Accordingly, Indians take their relationships with and responsibilities toward their extended family members very seriously. Traditional social patterns as outlined in the hierarchical caste system (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) continue to influence where Indians reside and how they interact with one another.

Residence

In rural areas, where 2/3 of India's population lives, extended families consisting of multiple generations typically share a dwelling. In densely populated urban areas, households are smaller, often consisting of just a nuclear family (2 parents and their children).

Rural: India's rural residents typically live in unplanned villages divided into distinct neighborhoods. Members of India's traditionally privileged castes (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) commonly live in the village core surrounded by clusters of lower caste Hindus and followers of other religious traditions (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Smaller hamlets may consist of members of a single caste (Photo Entrance gate of Khatkar Kalan village in Punjab).

Rural housing styles vary by climate. In tropical regions, simple 1-story homes are made with thatched grasses, clay, or mud with steep roofs to allow for rainwater runoff. Homes in arid regions are often simple adobe huts with tile roofs. More affluent residents may build with sheet metal, bricks, or cinder blocks. Personal space is usually limited; several family members may share one room where a ***chaarpai,*** a wooden platform with a woven sitting surface, may be the main furniture. Rural residents typically lack electricity, running water, and toilet facilities and usually cook outdoors.

Urban: In recent years, India's large cities have become congested, growing at faster rates than small cities and towns. Cities such as Delhi and Agra have an "old city" where people live separated by caste and religion as in villages. Within these cores, wealthy Indians tend to occupy the innermost centers while the poor occupy their peripheries. Following urbanization in the early 20th century and after partition (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), many cities established migrant housing in "model" towns or "colonies" of planned residential areas on city outskirts (Photo: ***Chawl*** or apartment house in Mumbai).

Housing shortages are a problem in many cities. About 17% of urban housing is categorized as slums, where residents use makeshift materials to construct temporary homes often at risk of demolition or structure collapse. Usually lacking clean water and sanitation infrastructure, these settlements are highly polluted and present serious public health challenges (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*). While the government has set goals to provide all Indians with adequate housing by 2022, many residents cannot afford even government-subsidized housing.

Family Structure

Family is the basic social unit in India; nearly all Indians marry and have children. Sons commonly remain with their families after marriage, while daughters move to their husbands' parents. Even if they move to a new town or city for school or work, individuals maintain close ties with their extended families.

While the oldest male is typically the head of the household, the oldest female generally manages the household and kitchen. Her work may also include overseeing household staff. As the family breadwinner, the father holds ultimate responsibility for instilling family values and ensuring proper social conduct. Younger family members treat elders with respect, often seeking their advice.

Children

Indians view children as a blessing and an essential outcome of marriage. Parents typically make great sacrifices for their children to ensure their well-being. To prepare them for the future role as head of a household, Indian families generally favor male children with more attention, better educational opportunities, and less household responsibility (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). From a young age, children help with household chores and learn social rules and their place in the social hierarchy from their siblings, cousins, and neighbors. If economic circumstances require it, some children may have to leave school and enter the labor market at a young age to help support their families.

Some Indian Hindus celebrate the journey through life with several ***samskara***, personal rites that mark various life stages. The most widely-celebrated *samskara*, are those associated with childhood: the baby-naming ceremony, the first time a child eats solid food (pictured), his first haircut, and his entrance into school.

Birth: After birth, the child's father or other male relative may place a drop of honey, curd, and butter in the baby's mouth to welcome it to the sweetness of the world. Although specific traditions vary across the country, the family usually celebrates a birth with music, treats, and gifts for the mother and child. In Muslim families, a religious leader may visit and recite prayers for the infant. At a Hindu ***namakaran*** ceremony, held 28 days after the birth, the father or other close relative announces the baby's name, often chosen with the help of a priest who has consulted the child's horoscope. The family may also hold a feast and distribute alms to the poor.

Initiation: Southern Indians celebrate a girl's first menstrual cycle as a sign of fertility and her entrance into womanhood. Muslim boys are circumcised by age 12. While barbers with no medical training traditionally performed circumcisions, many parents today rely on trained medical practitioners to perform the procedure.

Child Exploitation

Due to their families' dire economic circumstances, many Indian children are forced to work, sometimes enduring slave-like conditions. While laws prohibit children from working in factories and in hazardous environments, these laws do not apply to family-owned businesses or farms. Some children suffer abuse, abandonment, or forced early marriage. Still others become the victims of sex traffickers. Although the practice is outlawed, children are often subjected to corporal punishment and other abuse in school and other institutional settings.

Marriage

Indian parents typically arrange their children's marriages, relying on friends, acquaintances, work colleagues, newspaper ads, or matchmaking websites to find suitable partners. Matches are based on caste (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*), class, education, and social standing. Hindu families may also consult a priest or astrologer to determine a good match. The couple may meet before the marriage and usually have the right to reject a potential partner.

Although relatively uncommon, some Indians choose their own partners then ask their parents to "arrange" the marriage. Western-style dating is uncommon, but it is gaining some popularity in larger cities. While some cross-caste marriages occur, Indians rarely marry outside their religion. Although polygyny, the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously, is legal for Muslim men, few engage in the practice.

Dowry: The tradition of giving dowry, a payment made by the bride's family to the groom's family, is illegal yet common in many areas. Historically, dowries were often expensive and burdensome to the bride's family and frequently resulted in a bride's abuse or death if the payment was deemed inadequate. While the dowry today may be just a small symbolic gift for the couple to start their new life, cases of "dowry deaths" still occur.

Weddings: Indian weddings typically involve elaborate celebration and feasting, often at great expense. While specific rituals vary according to religious tradition, most Indian brides wear red ***saris*** (cloth wrap – see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) and decorate their hands and feet with intricate henna (a plant dye) designs. Indian grooms often present their brides with a ***thaali***, a gold necklace.

At traditional Hindu marriages, the groom dresses elegantly and travels to the bride's home on horseback, leading a ***barat*** or a procession of family, friends, and musicians. The couple greets each other by placing vermilion powder (pigment) on each other's forehead and exchanging flower garlands. Under a covered pavilion, the couple recites wedding vows while taking 7 steps around a fire, symbolizing the beginning of their journey together. A priest recites prayers and ties the couple's wrists together with string to symbolize their union. During the ceremony, the groom applies a red dot (***bindi***), to his wife's forehead as an indication of her married status.

Muslim weddings also include processions to the bride's home. There, the groom formally announces his desire to marry the bride in the ***nikaah*** ceremony. After the families exchange gifts, the couple state their intent to marry and sign the marriage contract in the presence of witnesses and a religious leader. The families then celebrate with a feast.

Divorce

Due to the social and religious importance of marriage, divorce is rare and highly stigmatized. When it does occur, Indian law stipulates that divorced men must continue to provide for their ex-wives and children. Historically, many divorce courts aimed to keep couples together rather than facilitate their separation. A 2013 law significantly changed Hindu marriage law, including allowing no-fault divorce and expanding women's inheritance rights.

Death

After death, Hindus typically initiate mortuary rites within a few hours. While deceased infants or children may be buried or set afloat on a river, Hindus prefer to cremate adults as the quickest way to release the spirit into the rebirth cycle (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The deceased is bathed, clothed, and covered with flowers. Male mourners accompany the deceased to the cremation grounds, while female mourners grieve at home. At the cremation grounds, the deceased is placed on a funeral pyre, which the deceased's oldest son lights after reciting scriptural verses.

Following the cremation, the ashes are collected for scattering in a holy river. Members of the immediate family then observe a period of mourning during which they perform various cleansing rituals and observe certain religious and dietary restrictions. A few days after the cremation, family members often gather to share a meal and donate to the poor or to a charity in honor of the deceased (Photo: ***Raj Ghat***, a memorial to Mahatma Gandhi that marks his cremation site in Delhi).

Historically, a few Hindu widows performed ***sati***, an ancient practice in which a woman commits suicide by throwing herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Although the practice was outlawed during the British colonial period (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*) and furthered criminalized by the Indian government in 1988, widows still occasionally perform *sati*.

Muslims also bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death. The deceased is bathed and clothed in a shroud, then carried to the burial site by male family members where final prayers are whispered into the deceased's ear as the body is laid in the grave. Following the burial, friends and relatives visit the immediate family to provide comfort and food. Family members share feasts of remembrance 40 days and 4, 6, 9, and 12 months after the death.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Despite gains in education and employment opportunities, Indian women face significant challenges. Among the world's 20 major economies, India recently ranked 108th based on parameters of gender equality in health, education, economics, and politics. Specific attitudes regarding gender roles and sexuality vary by region, caste, and socioeconomic background.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Labor: Indian women are traditionally responsible for childcare and household duties. Poor and lower caste women also commonly perform a significant amount of agricultural labor (pictured). By contrast, some upper class Hindu and Muslim women follow a tradition called ***purdah*** in which they live secluded in their family homes, leaving only when accompanied by male relatives. Such seclusion is meant to protect women from exploitation or negative influences. Since a woman symbolizes a family's honor, her seclusion also protects the family. *Purdah* can also be a status symbol – proof that the family is wealthy enough to forego a wife's income.

Labor Force: According to official statistics, about 21% of Indian women work outside the home. This rate is on par with Pakistan's 25% rate but much lower than other countries in the region. Of note, India's percentage is likely notably higher, since women who perform manual labor for reduced wages (such as in agriculture or construction) are not included in these statistics. Through increased educational opportunities, a greater number of women are employed in a broader range of fields. Nevertheless, about 50% of women leave the workforce before reaching senior management levels, often citing limited job flexibility offered to women with children. Women also typically receive less pay and fewer promotions than their male colleagues. In addition, they are often subject to other forms of discrimination, including sexual harassment.

Gender and the Law

Some civil, customary, and religious laws discriminate against women, while others designed to promote gender equality are not enforced. For example, some tribal land systems deny women the right to own land, while under Islamic ***sharia*** law, Muslim women typically inherit less than men. Although laws set the minimum marriage age at 18 for women and 21 for men, they do not criminalize child marriages. Instead, they only provide a process for voiding them. Generally, marriage laws are inconsistently enforced. In 2018, about 27% of married Indian women reported they had married before age 18.

Indians' preference for male children over female (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*) is cause for some cases of female infanticide and abandonment. While the law forbids prenatal sex selection (methods to control the sex of babies before birth), it is rarely enforced. Consequently, India's male-female sex ratio at birth is skewed, with about 111 boys born for every 100 girls in 2018. The federal and various state governments have instituted programs aimed at combating prenatal sex selection and child marriage by providing financial incentives and education programs to poor families.

Gender and Politics

Women in India have a long history of political participation. Indira Gandhi became one of the world's first female heads of state in 1966 (see p. 11-12 of *History and Myth*). Many other female politicians hold powerful party and government positions. In 2018, women held 11% of lower house and 12% of upper house seats, compared with 24% and 24% in the US Congress. In 2018, 22% of cabinet ministers were women, compared with 22% in the US. On a local level, India's constitution now requires 30% of seats in local councils to be reserved for women. Despite such provisions, women face religious, cultural, and structural barriers to fully participating in political life (Photo: Women in South India listen to then-US Secretary of State Clinton in 2011).

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Domestic abuse, “honor killings” (killing a son or daughter for having a relationship or marrying without family consent), “eve teasing” (sexual harassment), and other forms of GBV are prevalent in Indian society. In a recent survey, 31% of women reported some form of violence in the home. Rape is criminalized, yet victims are often stigmatized or blamed.

Instead of filing charges, law enforcement officials sometimes try to reconcile attackers and victims, even encouraging their marriage. In 2012, a brutal gang rape and death of a woman in New Delhi sparked nationwide protests. While subsequent legislation strengthened laws against GBV, implementation of the laws remains weak.

Sex and Procreation

While South Asian literature includes the ***Kamasutra***, an ancient Hindu text known as the first manual on sex education, Indians typically consider sexual intimacy a private matter. Public displays of affection are considered distasteful and sometimes banned. Although premarital sex is considered unacceptable for both genders, women are held to a higher standard of chastity outside of marriage than men. India's birthrate dropped from almost 6 children per woman in 1960 to 2.4 in 2020, largely due to government family planning initiatives (Photo: US soldier visits a family in Agra).

LGBT Issues: India criminalizes homosexual relations, with punishment up to 10 years in prison. While prosecutions are rare, these laws are often used to harass, discriminate, or blackmail individuals. In 2013, India's Supreme Court overturned a lower court's ruling that colonial-era bans on homosexuality were unconstitutional, sparking widespread protests across the LGBT community. Following similar developments in Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that transgender or intersex people known as ***hijras*** may be recognized as a separate “third” gender. This ruling granted them legal rights and privileges, including access to education, employment, and healthcare.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

While linguists believe India is home to over 400 languages and dialects, its census counts 114 languages of which 24 have over 1 million speakers. India's constitution recognizes 22 official languages: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu.

As the names suggest, some administrative divisions in India align with linguistic boundaries: Bengali is primarily spoken in Bengal, Punjabi is primarily spoken in Punjab, etc. Indians often move for work and education and typically are exposed to a number of languages. Most educated Indians speak several languages, at the least their mother tongue, Hindi, and English. Generally, if people do not share a first language, they communicate in Hindi or English.

The most widely spoken languages divide into 2 families: Indo-Aryan languages in the North and Dravidian languages in the South. The oldest Indo-Aryan language is Sanskrit, the ancient language of literature, poetry, and the courts. Today, Sanskrit is the primary language of Hindu religious rituals and observance. Hindi and other languages of northern Indian, including Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Kashmiri, and Punjabi, developed from it.

Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada are the 4 most widely spoken Dravidian languages of southern India. Several Austro-Asiatic languages are spoken in eastern India, including Santhali and Mundari. Finally, some Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken in India's far northern and eastern border regions (Illustration: Early 17th century Sanskrit text).

Hindi

Spoken by about 41% of India's population as a mother tongue, Hindi is India's primary language in government, business, and education. With a word order similar to English and 36 consonants and 11 separate vowels, Hindi is relatively easy for foreign nationals to pronounce. Speakers of other official languages occasionally express resentment of Hindi's dominance. For example, Tamil speakers in southern India have opposed the adoption of Hindi as the single national language, fearing that non-native Hindi speakers would become economically and politically disadvantaged.

Of note, Hindi and Urdu (1 of India's official languages and also Pakistan's national language) are mutually intelligible. Although their vocabularies diverge slightly, their most significant difference is their written forms. Unlike Hindi's use of Devanagari script (see p. 13 of *Part 1-Culture General*), Urdu is written in Arabic script. Since Urdu is associated with Muslims and Hindi with Hindus, speakers tend to notice linguistic differences rather than similarities.

Writing System: Hindi's Devanagari script is written in horizontal lines from left to right. Each letter represents a consonant and carries an inherent schwa (ə) vowel sound (pronounced like the "a" in "about"). If a word requires a letter with a different vowel sound, a writer modifies the letter with a particular mark called a ***halant***. A distinctive horizontal line runs along the top of letters and words (*हलन्त*). The end of a sentence is marked by a vertical line or period (Photo: Sign in Hindi, English, and Urdu).

Although Indians use Arabic numerals to write numbers, they often use the ancient Vedic numbering system to write large numbers. Terminology and comma placement differentiate this system from the standard Western system. For example, 100,000 is described in the Vedic system as 1 ***lakh*** or 1,00,000 and 10 million as 1 ***crore*** or 1,00,00,000. Accordingly, 1 million is 10 *lakhs*.

Indian English

Indian English evolved during the British colonial period, when it developed its own unique characteristics such as distinct vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and pronunciation. In addition, Indians often use English phrases that sound old-fashioned beyond the subcontinent. For example, Indians may politely ask, “May I know your good name?” or employ other “flowery” phrases. In other situations, they may use shortened forms of phrases, such as offering “isn’t it?” instead of “isn’t that the case” at the end of a sentence, or simply saying “tell me” to communicate “I’m listening” or “can I help you?” Of note, many words from Indian languages are now part of Americans’ everyday vocabulary, including veranda, sandal, shampoo, turban, pundit, and yoga.

English

During the 200 years of British presence in India (see p. 7-10 of *History and Myth*), English was India’s de facto administrative language. Today, India’s constitution defines English as a “subsidiary official language.” Generally associated with prestige, power, and influence, English is used in government, business, education, and national communications. While most educated Indians speak and write impeccable English, less-educated Indians, such as shopkeepers and street vendors, are sometimes semi-literate in English. Of note, Indians with higher social standing can demonstrate power or “pull rank” over a subordinate by choosing to converse in English rather than in an Indian language.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in India requires not only knowledge of native languages, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-

taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

India's traditional, complex social hierarchy, known as the caste system (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*), continues to influence communication patterns. Accordingly, Indians treat people of different castes, ages, genders, and backgrounds with varying levels of respect. For example, individuals in junior social positions are deferential and highly respectful of authority figures and people of high status. In business contexts, high-level managers make key decisions typically without consulting lower level employees.

Indian society emphasizes the well-being of the group over the individual. Accordingly, Indians often make decisions through group consensus rather than relying on individual judgment. Generally friendly and hospitable, Indians value courtesy, cooperation, and respect in both business interactions and in daily life. They often avoid talking about contentious issues and keep negative opinions to themselves. Typically, Indians prefer to provide affirmative answers to requests, often refraining from providing negative responses out of politeness. Thus, foreign nationals should not consider vague answers, such as "maybe" or "I'll try" as signs of dishonesty when an Indian does not follow through.

Greetings

Hindus greet one another by bringing flat palms together at chest level and slightly bowing the head. While making this gesture, they say ***namaste*** (in the North) or ***namaskara*** (in the South), which translates as "I pay my respects to you") (Photo: US and Indian Army personnel perform an unusually deep greeting). Muslims greet one another by saying "***Assalam 'alaikum***" (or "peace be upon you") and responding with "***Vaalaikum salaam***" (or "and unto you, peace").

Some Indians may shake hands, a form of greeting most common among men, in large cities, and among Indians accustomed to interacting with foreign nationals. When greeting members of the opposite sex, foreign nationals should wait for their conversation partner to initiate the handshake. Devout Muslims may decline to touch a member of the opposite sex, preferring to greet with a nod or slight bow.

Names

Hindus in northern India typically use both a given name (first name) and surname (last name). Surnames are less common in the South, where residents instead use the initial of their father's first name along with their own name, such as "B. Siva" or "Siva B." On formal occasions, Indians may supplement first names with "s/o" (son of) and "d/o" (daughter of) followed by the father's first name, for example Siva s/o ("son of") Bhaskaran.

Most Muslims in India do not have surnames. Instead, they adopt their father's given name, connecting it to their first name with the word ***bin*** (for men) and ***binti*** (for women). For example, Rashid bin Abdullah is "Rashid, son of Abdullah."

Forms of Address

Typically, only close friends address one another by first names. Instead, Indians use titles to indicate respect, social status, education, profession, and age. Professional titles, such as "Professor," "Doctor," and "Engineer," followed by a first or last name are most common. In the absence of a professional title, Indians use the honorific ***Sri*** and ***Srimati***, the Indian equivalent of Mr. and Mrs. Further, when added to words for relatives, greetings, and names the suffix ***ji*** conveys respect and endearment, as in "***namasteji***" (Photo: US Sailor with Indian students).

Generally, Indians greet the most senior or eldest person first. When addressing an elder, Indians use respectful titles such as ***bapaji*** (respected dear father) or the equivalent for mother, uncle, or aunt. Strangers address one another by the polite

bhayya (brother) or ***bahanji*** (sister). For example, a cab driver might respectfully address his passenger as "***Bhayya***…."

Conversational Topics

Indians typically begin conversations with friendly, personal questions about family, marital status, occupation, educational background, and hobbies. Inquiries regarding favorite sports teams and music preferences are especially popular. Foreign nationals should feel free to discuss these and similar topics, such as food and positive observations about India. They should generally avoid discussions about religion, politics, poverty, pollution, and the caste system (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: Delhi's main bazaar).

Gestures

While Indians use gestures to augment their words, they consider excessive hand gestures rude or inappropriate. Indians do not point with a single finger. Instead, they "point" with an extended arm with the palm facing down. To beckon someone, they move the fingers toward the body. A common Indian gesture is the "head bobble," performed by wiggling the head from side to side. Although the gesture's meaning often depends on context, common meanings are "OK," "yes," "maybe," and "I understand." Another common gesture is a horizontal head shake, which Westerners typically interpret as "no" but actually means "yes."

Traditionally, some Indians reserve the left hand for personal hygiene and therefore consider it unclean. Consequently, they use only the right hand to pass and receive objects, eat, and shake hands. Some also consider the feet to be unclean and refrain from showing their soles and using their feet to point or move objects. Of note, in a traditional gesture of humility and respect, Indians may greet an elder by touching his foot.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Romanized Hindi	*Hindi*
Hello	namastey / namaskaar	नमस्ते / नमस्कार
How are you?	aap kaisey hain?	आप कैसे हैं?
I am fine, thank you	may theek hun, dhanyavaad, or aap?	मैं ठीक हूँ, धन्यवाद, ओर आप ?
My name is ___	mera naam ___ hai	मेरा नाम ___ है
Pleased to meet you	aap sey milkaR khushee huwee	आप से मिल कर ख़ुशी हुई
Please	kripayaa	कृपया
Thank you	ddanyavaad	धन्यवाद
Yes	haan	हाँ
No	naa	ना
Thank you for your help	madad key leeyey dhanyavaad	मदद के लिए धन्यवाद
Can someone help us?	kyaa koee hamaaRee madad kaR saktaa hai?	क्या कोई हमारी मदद कर सकता है?
Excuse me / I'm sorry	sunyey, maaf kiziye	सुनये, माफ़ कीजिए
I want / I do not want	mujey chaheeyey / mujey nahee chaheeyey	मुझे ___ चाहिये / मुझे ___ नहीं चाहिये
Goodbye	Alvidaa	अलविदा/
Who?	kon?	कौन?
What?	kya?	क्या?
When?	kab?	कब?
Where?	kahaa?	कहाँ?
Why?	kyun?	क्यों?
Do you have?	aapkey paas ___ hai?	आपके पास ___ है?
Help me	meri madad kiaiye	मदद करो
Stop!	Rukiye!	रुको

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 74.4%
- Male: 82.4%
- Female: 65.8% (2018 estimate)

Early History of Education

South Asia's long history of formal education dates to about 700 BC, when the world's oldest recognized center of higher learning was established at Takshashila (Taxila) in present-day Pakistan. By the 5th century, the education system had grown to include the famed Nalanda school in Bihar state, where arts, logic, philosophy, and Buddhist religious education was taught to over 10,000 students and scholars over the span of 8 centuries (Photo: Ruins of the Baladitya Temple at Nalanda in Bihar, India).

In addition to these centers of higher learning, education occurred through the ***gurukula*** system, in which ***gurus*** (teachers) taught students reading, writing, math, sciences, and religious education in their homes, in temples, and in monasteries. In support of the caste system (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*), this system commonly divided students into cohorts based on their assigned roles in society. These social divisions included Brahmins (priest class), Kshatriya (warrior class), and Vaishya (merchant class). Each group received unique training to prepare members for future duties. Meanwhile, Shudras (the working class) typically were denied formal education.

The ***gurukula*** system prevailed until the early 19th century, when British colonial authorities (see p. 7-10 of *History and Myth*) introduced the British educational system. In the mid-19th century the British established India's 3 founding universities - The University of Mumbai, University of Madras, and the University of Calcutta.

Education in the mid-20th Century

During British colonialism (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*), India's education system was highly exclusive and available only to a select minority within Indian society. Following independence from Britain in 1947 (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*) India sought to end educational inequities and improve literacy rates. Accordingly, its 1950 Constitution formally prohibited discrimination in education based on caste, sex, religion, or race.

The 1968 National Policy on Education (NPE) standardized India's education structure. Emphasizing universal access and enrollment, the NPE called for free, generalized, and well-rounded primary education for all children up to age 14. The NPE also stipulated that secondary and tertiary education would provide highly selective and specialized academic and vocational programs.

In 1986, reforms to the NPE aimed to remove especially pervasive and lingering social disparities, mostly involving women and members of historically disadvantaged groups, such as Indian tribes and certain castes (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Consequently, the NPE expanded scholarships, created adult education programs, and provided economic incentives to pursue education to poor, low-caste families. The NPE was modified again in 1992, creating standardized entrance examinations for technical programs and improving nationwide standards of professional programs.

Because of these and other government efforts to improve the education system, national literacy rates have increased dramatically, from 44% in 1981 to 74% in 2018. Despite this improvement, India's literacy rate remains low compared to other countries in the region such as Sri Lanka (92%) and the Maldives (99%) (Photo: Teacher giving reading instruction).

Modern Education System

Indian families place high value on education, believing it to be key to improving their children's futures.

Consequently, families teach the importance of education to their children from a young age, and parents are often highly involved in their children's schooling. Access to education remains split along India's many social divides (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Literacy rates are higher in urban areas than in rural, among the wealthy versus the poor, and among men than women. Finally, they also vary substantially among castes.

Affirmative action programs, many of which are outlined in the NPE, help combat educational disparities by continuing to reserve places in public educational institutions for members of socially disadvantaged groups. Despite these and other efforts, socioeconomic issues continue to present substantial barriers to educational attainment.

Although public schooling is free and compulsory from age 6-14, high levels of poverty force many children to leave school to pursue work (see p. 3-4 in *Family and Kinship*). In rural areas, many families are challenged by the distance to school and the high cost of supplies. Further, many public schools are understaffed and inadequately equipped for their typically large class sizes. While private institutions offer excellent programs, entry is highly competitive and the schools are unaffordable for most families.

Primary: Primary school consists of either 7 grades (in 12 states and Union Territories) or 8 grades (in 23 states and Union Territories). The primary cycle is divided into 2 stages: lower primary (typically grades 1-5) and upper primary (typically grades 6-8). Subjects include reading, writing, math, history, geography, science, and civics (Photo: Primary school students in Mangalore).

Lower primary instruction in public schools is typically in regional languages (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*), although English is used exclusively in many private schools. English is compulsory instruction at all public upper primary schools. At the end of each year, students must pass an examination to move onto the next

level. While 98% of children of the appropriate age initially enroll in primary school, 6% of those enrollees drop out before primary completion.

Secondary: Unlike primary school, secondary school is neither compulsory nor free, only 91% of students transition to secondary. Like the primary level, courses in lower secondary (grades 9-10) emphasize general education. Subjects include language, math, science, social studies, art, pre-vocational education, and physical and health education. To graduate, students must pass an examination at the end of grade 10.

Upper secondary (grades 11-12) provides either academic or vocational education. The academic track prepares students for post-secondary education in the fields of science, business, or humanities. Academic programs are offered at specialized secondary schools, 2-year colleges, and university-affiliated colleges.

Vocational programs, offered at technical secondary schools, provide technical training in fields such as agriculture, technology, commerce, and paramedical services, among others. Upon graduation, students may enroll in apprenticeship programs for further training or directly enter the workforce.

Post-Secondary: Around 28% of Indians eventually pursue a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree at one of India's many universities or affiliated colleges. Many institutions, particularly at the graduate level, provide instruction entirely in English, while others also instruct in regional languages.

India's network of post-secondary schools is expanding quickly. In 2019, India had more than 993 universities, 39,931 colleges and 10,725 stand-alone institutions. Experts argue that this unabated growth has lowered the quality of higher education. Even though the venerated Indian Institutes of Technology (pictured) are among the world's best universities, many other institutions operate on a sub-standard level.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Indians tend to have a flexible view of time and typically invest a notable amount towards fostering relationships. Due to a lack of sanitation facilities, poor urban and rural residents may use public spaces, such as fields or a water pump, to wash and relieve themselves.

Time and Work

India's work week runs from Monday-Saturday, with hours varying by establishment type. Most banks are open from 10:00am-2:00pm on weekdays and 10:00am-12:00pm on Saturdays. Private businesses are open from 9:30am-5:30pm, while post offices are generally open from 10:00am-5:00pm Monday-Saturday. Although most stores are open from 10:00am-7:00pm 7 days a week, some close on Sundays. Most museums are closed on Mondays (Photo: An outdoor fish market in Mumbai).

Working Conditions: Varying by state, strict labor laws protect employees from unfair dismissal, help prevent discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, and religion, and prohibit child labor, among others. These laws also limit the work week to 48 hours, with a maximum of 8 hours per day and a 6-day work week. Despite these provisions, many Indians work longer than 8-hour days, often without overtime compensation.

Time Zone and Date Notation: India Standard Time (IST) is 5.5 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 10.5 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). India does not observe daylight savings time.

Indian Calendars: While Indians frequently use the Western calendar for their daily lives, the government also issues the Indian National Calendar (INC), a combination lunar-solar calendar that has 12 months of 30 or 31 days.

Unlike the Western Calendar, the INC's new year begins on March 22. Hindus use lunar and solar calendars to calculate religious festivals and favorable dates for certain celebrations and rituals (see p. 3-6 of *Family and Kinship*). According to these calendars, the new day begins at sunrise.

Muslims use the lunar Islamic calendar to calculate religious holidays. According to the Islamic lunar calendar, days begin at sunset and each new week begins at sunset on Saturday. Consequently, the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

National Holidays

These holidays occur on fixed dates:

- January 26: Republic Day
- August 15: Independence Day
- October 2: Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday

Many other holidays and festivals occur on variable dates according to the appropriate calendar:

- ***Diwali***: Hindu Festival of Lights
- ***Shivaratri:*** Festival for the Hindu God Shiva
- ***Holi:*** Hindu Festival of Colors/Festival of Love
- ***Maha Navrati:*** Celebrates winter's begin
- ***Makar Sankrati***: Celebrates winter's end
- ***Ganesh Chathurthi***: Celebrates the Hindu deity Ganesh
- ***Guru Nanak Jayanti***: Celebrates the birth of the first Sikh Guru
- ***Awal Muharram***: Islamic New Year
- ***Ramadan:*** Muslim month of fasting
- ***Eid ul-Fitr***: End of *Ramadan*
- ***Eid al-Adha:*** Muslim Festival of the Sacrifice
- ***Maulud Nabi***: Celebrates the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday

Time and Business

While Indians typically admire punctuality, they are often very late to appointments and may not adhere to deadlines as rigidly as in the US. Nevertheless, foreign nationals should strive to respectfully arrive at meetings and finish work on time yet be gracious if their Indian colleagues are delayed or tardy.

Generally, business tends to move at an unhurried pace, primarily because Indians prefer to establish personal relationships prior to doing business. Since it can take several meetings for Indians to achieve trust and respect with new acquaintances, business proceedings may be slow.

Of note, Indian companies adhere to strict hierarchies having rigid lines of authority that define roles, duties, and responsibilities. Managers tend to demand respect and obedience from their employees, make all final business decisions, and rarely ask for feedback or recommendations from lower level staff. In turn, employees strive to please their leadership, never contradicting them or questioning their decisions. Further, employees carefully avoid making mistakes. If they do, they tend to avoid disclosing their failures.

Personal Space

As is common in many societies, personal space in India depends on the nature of the relationship. In social settings, Indians usually stand about an arm's length or more apart while conversing. Strangers may stand slightly farther apart, while friends and family typically stand closer (Photo: A crowded street in New Delhi).

Touch

Although social touching and displays of affection between family and close friends are common, foreign nationals should wait for Indians to initiate contact during greetings and conversations. Friends of the same gender often hold hands in public places or walk with intertwined arms.

Of note, many Indians consider displays of affection between people of the opposite sex inappropriate. This custom is changing somewhat among young couples in large urban areas where it is more acceptable for them to hold hands in public. Nevertheless, foreign nationals should avoid physical contact with members of the opposite sex, especially in rural areas where conservative traditions are upheld.

Eye Contact

Most Indian men maintain direct eye contact when conversing, while women, especially in rural areas, may make eye contact only intermittently. Still, it is common for close friends and family to maintain direct eye contact when conversing, regardless of gender. Of note, employees may avoid direct eye contact with authority figures to show respect.

Photographs

Although photography is usually permitted on the grounds of temples, shrines, and other places of worship, it may be prohibited inside. Foreign nationals should always acquire an Indian's permission before taking his photo. Banks, stores, and government offices may prohibit photography.

Driving

In 2016, India (23) exceeded the world average of 18 traffic-related fatalities per 100,000 people. Roads are especially dangerous for pedestrians, as Indian drivers tend to speed and ignore traffic laws. Although roads in large cities are well maintained, roads in rural areas are often poor and worsen during the monsoon season. Traffic is a major problem in cities, where cars share the crowded streets with cyclists, carts, rickshaws, cows, and other animals (Photo: A man pulls a fully loaded cart in Mumbai). Although the police typically do not enforce most traffic laws, drunk-driving is a serious offense punishable with imprisonment. Unlike Americans, Indians drive on the left side of the road.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Indian aesthetics reflect the region's rich cultural diversity developed over several thousand years. Similarly, recreation and leisure pursuits demonstrate its pluralism and sense of community.

Dress and Appearance

Women: Indian dress is a mix of traditional and modern. The traditional ***sari*** remains the most common woman's garment. It is a piece of cloth several yards in length, wrapped around the body and draped over one shoulder. In more conservative communities, the *sari* extends over the head like a veil. Ways of wrapping a *sari* vary according to region and other factors, such as socioeconomic status or religious affiliation (Photo: Then-US Secretary of State Kerry thanks women dressed in *saris*).

Women also wear the ***salwar kameez,*** consisting of tapered, ankle-length trousers (*salwar)* beneath a long, tunic-like garment *(kameez).* Also common, particularly in urban centers such as Delhi and Mumbai, are jeans and an Indian-style ***kurta*** – a shorter version of *kameez*. In more conservative Muslim areas women might wear traditional religious garments, such as the ***abaya*** or ***burqa***, These simple, loose, robe-like over-garments are also common in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Men: Indian men commonly wear Western-style clothes, including business suits, shirts, and pants. A popular men's traditional garment is the ***dhoti,*** a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and through the legs, under a *kurta.* Of note, Mahatma Gandhi adopted the *dhoti* as his austere attire during the independence movement (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*) to encourage Indians to use their own cotton to make cloth. Many politicians continue to wear the *dhoti* as a show of authenticity to their constituents. The Nehru-style jacket worn over long pants is also a popular style for men.

In southern India, men also wear a ***lungi,*** a type of sarong or wrap-around skirt common in Southeast Asia. Male Muslims may wear the ***topi,*** the traditional Muslim prayer cap. By contrast, male followers of Sikhism (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) typically cover their heads with elaborately wrapped turbans that exhibit varied colors and wrapping styles (Photo: A Sikh Indian Air Force squadron leader in a turban).

Recreation and Leisure

For most Indians, recreation and leisure time is about family and friends. On weekends, families may relax and picnic together at local parks or enjoy going to the cinema to see the latest Bollywood hit (see "Cinema" below). Friends and family frequently visit each other's homes to share meals or to celebrate special events and religious festivals.

Many Indians take advantage of the country's affordable railway system (see p. 2 of *Technology and Material*) to travel to their family's ancestral village, carry out a religious pilgrimage, or visit historical sites.

Festivals: India has 3 national holidays – Republic Day (to celebrate India becoming a sovereign republic), Independence Day (the day India achieved its independence from the British), and Gandhi's birthday (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). In addition, Indians enjoy a rich variety of religious festivals and celebrations regardless of their personal religious affiliations.

For example, Muslims commonly participate in activities and customs associated with Hindu festivals such as Holi and Diwali (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Similarly, Hindus celebrate the end of Ramadan with their Muslim neighbors and friends, while both Hindus and Muslims celebrate Christian Christmas. Indians also enjoy many festivals that commemorate lunar events and the changing of the seasons.

Sports and Games

Cricket: Although field hockey is India's national sport, cricket is arguably its favorite pastime. Introduced by British merchants, cricket was first played on India's west coast. Today, Indians enjoy watching their national team participate in the ICC Cricket World Cup and the 8 regional teams that comprise the domestic Indian Premier League. While groups commonly gather in public venues to view a match, children and adults alike enjoy impromptu games in village streets (Photo: A US sailor participates in a cricket match with Indian Navy personnel).

Martial arts: Methods and techniques honed during India's early history of combat gave rise to current wrestling and martial arts forms, such as ***kalaripayattu***, a martial arts form originating in the South in the 11th century. It historically involved teams of suicide warriors (***chaverpada***) who dueled to the death on behalf of noblemen. Today, practitioners wield a variety of weapons such as the ***urumi*** (a sword with a flexible blade), but also use grappling methods and bodily strikes in order to defeat their opponents. Of note, well-known East Asian martial arts forms such as karate and judo are rooted in ancient Indian forms that migrated east over the centuries.

Other sports: Indians also enjoy sports such as field hockey and soccer. The latter is particularly popular in the states of Kerala and Goa and in the city of Kolkata. Upperclassmen might play golf or even polo. People in rural areas may engage in traditional team sports, such as ***gili danda*** (similar to cricket) or ***kabbadim***, in which teammates try to tag members of an opposing team. Most sports are still primarily activities for men, although some women play tennis, table tennis, field hockey, and badminton.

Indian athletes participate in the Commonwealth Games, a 3-week long sports competition among British Commonwealth member countries. India hosted the games in 2010. India also hosted the inaugural Asian Games in 1951 and is in competition to host the event again in 2019.

Games: Board games familiar to Westerners, such as parcheesi, chess, and snakes and ladders, have ancient Indian roots and remain popular. Indians also enjoy card games and kite fighting, when players attempt to "snag" an opponent's kite.

Yoga

Yoga is a series of poses ***(asanas)***, breathing patterns, and meditation ***(prayana)***, originating in India more than 2,000 years ago. In Sanskrit (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) yoga means "union," indicating that practitioners seek to connect the physical with the spiritual. Yoga is taught by ***gurus*** (teachers) at ***ashrams***, special designated places of instruction. Yoga approaches have evolved over the centuries to emphasize different techniques and objectives. While Rishikesh, in the state of Uttarkhand, is widely recognizes as the "yoga capital of the world," *ashrams* are found all over India.

Performance Arts

Music: There are 2 types of classical Indian music – Hindustani in the North and Karnatak (or Carnatic) in the South. Hindustani musical instruments include the ***sitar***, a stringed instrument; the lute-like ***sarod***; the ***tabla***, a pair of drums; and the ***shehnai***, a reed instrument that is reminiscent of the stereotypical snake charmer's music. Karnatak music is performed on the *sitar*-like ***vina***; the ***mridangam*** (similar to the *tabla)*; the ***nadaswaram*** (a long oboe); and the violin.

Elements of Indian classical music include the ***raga*** (melody); ***tala*** (rhythm); the drone or steady tone played continuously throughout the piece, usually on an instrument called a ***tanpura***; and improvisation. Classical vocal styles include the oldest, most basic form called ***dhrupad***; ***khayal,*** which supplanted *dhrupad* in the 18th century; ***thumri***, love songs conveyed from a woman's point of view; and ***ghazal,*** derived from the Islamic poetry form and sung in Urdu (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*). The late Ravi Shankar, India's most renowned

sitar player, is credited with acquainting the West with Indian classical music.

More recent musical genres include ***filmi,*** songs associated with the movie industry, and ***Indipop***, Indian pop music. While many *Indipop* artists sing in Hindi or Punjabi, pop music is produced in all regional languages.

Theater and Dance: Although no longer a purely religious form of expression, Indian dance continues to reflect its roots in Hindu worship. Classical dance styles, costumes, and themes vary from region to region, with the 2 most common forms, ***Bharat Natyam*** and ***Kathak,*** associated with southern and northern India, respectively.

A common defining feature of Indian dance is the use of hand gestures and facial expressions to convey meaning to the audience. Another is the use of bells on dancers' ankles to draw attention to their footwork and provide a source of rhythm. Performances most commonly depict religious scenes from sacred Hindu Indian literature (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Photo: Dancers perform classical South Indian dance styles).

Cinema: The large and successful Indian film industry is known as Bollywood, a reference to American "Hollywood" and the industry's base in Bombay (known as Mumbai today). Bollywood is most famous for its high-drama storylines featuring elaborate song and dance routines. Well-known Bollywood actors include Amitabh Bachchan, most famously associated with the "hero" archetype, and newer icons such as Shah Rukh Khan, Hrithrik Roshan, Katrina Kapoor, and Deepika Padukone.

Other films draw attention to the social and political realities of contemporary Indian society. A prominent example is Deepa Mehta's famous *Elements trilogy* (*Fire, Earth,* and *Water)*.

Literature

The earliest Indian literature included ancient sacred texts written in Sanskrit (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). During the Mauryan Empire (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), India's famous epic poems, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* which had been conveyed orally for centuries, first appeared in written form (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*). At 100,000 verses, the *Mahabharata* is the longest poem ever written.

Other great Indian poets include Khusrao, a Muslim who expanded the use of the *ghazal* form during the 13th and 14th centuries, and Rabindranath Tagore, who composed the lyrics to India's national anthem. In the early 20th century, Tagore became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Famous modern authors include Salman Rushdie, who combined social/religious commentary with magical realism in novels such as *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses,* and Arundhati Roy, who won the Booker Prize in 1992 with her novel, *The God of Small Things.*

Visual Arts and Crafts

Like other creative forms in India, traditional art is rooted in religion. Carvings, sculpture, and paintings often portray Hindu deities, depict scenes from Puranic texts (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), or follow the Buddha's journey to enlightenment (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Later forms include paintings of court life during the Mughal Empire (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*) and Indian interpretations of famous European works (Illustration: A 17th century Mughal Empire depiction of a poet).

"Handicrafts," as they are known in India, reflect regional specialization. While Kashmir is known for its luxurious shawls, bamboo wall art depicting coastal scenes is common in the South. Weavers in Assam produce intricate silk *saris,* while communities on India's west coast produce batik cloth. The Government of India has taken measures to protect artisans in these and other traditional handicraft "cottage industries."

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Traditional cuisine and dining etiquette play an important role in Indian culture and identity. Indian cuisine is diverse and extensive, emphasizing dishes accented by aromatic, bold, and spicy flavors. Every region has its own special ***garam masala***, or preferred spice mixture typically including pepper, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, and bay leaf, among others.

Dining Customs

Most Indians eat 2-4 meals per day, depending on their income, lifestyle, and occupation. A time-consuming process, family meal preparation is performed by the women, who typically buy fresh groceries daily. Lunch is typically Indians' largest and main meal. Perhaps because Indians typically eat their evening meal after 8:00pm, dinner is also often substantial (Photo: Rice and flatbreads served with a variety of Indian curries).

Most Indians eat only with their right hand (see p. 6 of *Language and Communication*), using their fingers and thumb to scoop food into their mouths. They clean their fingers as needed before and after the meal in a small water basin. If foreign nationals do not wish to use their hands, they may politely request a fork or spoon.

In urban areas, families typically eat at a table, while in rural areas or in poorer homes, diners commonly sit on mats on the floor. Visitors to a private home may not dine with all family members. Instead, as a sign of respect, hosts may invite guests to eat with just the family head or even dine alone.

After guests finish their food, they usually must decline several offers if they do not want additional servings. Conversely, guests who want more food are expected to decline initially out of politeness and accept only on the 2nd or 3rd offer.

Diet

Indian cuisine varies by region. In the South and Northeast, rice is popular, while various flatbreads are the main staple in the central plains and in the North. Fish is an important component of coastal diets, while food preparation in the Northeast is heavily influenced by Chinese traditions. Most Indians use chilies to pickle vegetables, although specific recipes also vary by region and family.

Curries are popular nationwide, yet preparation varies widely. Made by combining various spices, herbs, and fresh or dried chili peppers, curries are served with meat, fish, shellfish, or vegetables (Photo: Chicken curry). South India is famous for its fiery curries and for serving raw chili peppers alongside rice as a side. In other regions, flavors are typically milder and instead of rice, diners use ***roti*** (a flat bread made from stoneground whole meal flour), ***naan*** (a flat, yeast-leavened bread), or ***paratha*** (pan fried whole wheat bread) to scoop curries and other sauces. Cuisine in Muslim-influenced regions is characterized by rich, thick curries sprinkled with dried fruits and nuts.

Many Indians adhere to certain dietary restrictions. Observant Muslims (see p. 3-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they observe particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is ***halal***, allowed by Islamic law. Many Hindus (see p. 1-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) are strictly vegetarian and acquire their protein through beans, soy, and dairy products.

Popular Dishes and Foods

The most popular forms of protein are fish, chicken, mutton, and water buffalo. Popular vegetables include lentils, cauliflower, and spinach. Alongside rice or flatbreads Indians enjoy dishes such as ***tandoori*** (chicken cooked with spices in clay pots); ***kebab*** (grilled meats); ***korma*** (minced meat braised in spiced sauce); and ***raita*** (a vegetable salad dressed in yogurt). A typical lunch includes white rice or flatbreads served with lentils,

stew, yogurt, and a wide range of vegetable dishes. Dinner often includes curries with rice and flatbreads. For dessert, Indians serve milk-based sweets such as ***rasgulla***, spongy balls of cottage cheese or ***ras malai***, ricotta dumplings soaked in milk and flavored with cardamom. ***Ladoo*** (sweet nut and chickpea balls) are popular on special occasions.

Beverages

Indians typically drink water and other beverages after rather than during meals. Sometimes spiced with ginger, cloves, and cinnamon, ***chai*** (a blend of milk, tea, and sugar) is the most popular beverage, consumed before breakfast and throughout the day. Coffee is also widely available.

Even though prohibition was lifted in 1977 (except for the state of Gujarat), many Indians do not drink alcoholic beverages, perhaps in part because it is illegal to advertise. Consumption patterns are changing slightly among young urban Indians, as bars and clubs serving alcohol become more common in major cities. In rural areas, some Indians enjoy home-made alcoholic beverages, including ***toddy***, a wine made from coconut palm flower, and ***thara***, strong liquor made from sugarcane. Of note, only about 5% of Indian women drink alcohol.

Eating Out

Indians eat out regularly, with restaurant visits frequently lasting hours. Restaurants range from upscale establishments serving regional, national, and international foods to ***dhabbahs*** (rustic outdoor cafes) and small casual eateries. Of note, while upscale restaurants often charge a 15-20% mandatory “luxury” tip, most establishments expect modest tips of only a few rupees (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*).

With over 10 million registered vendors, street stalls are very popular. Some stalls specialize in ***dosai***, rice cakes fried and stuffed with potatoes, while others offer portions of fruits and vegetables, often served in banana leaves. Many stalls sell fried snacks like ***jalebis***, sweet fried dough, and ***samosas*** (pictured), pastries with savory fillings.

Health Overview

The overall health of Indians has improved since the nation's independence in 1947 through a combination of efforts led by the Indian government, private and civil sectors, and international agencies. Between 1950-2020, life expectancy at birth jumped from approximately 38 to 70 years. Meanwhile, over the last 35 years, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from 114 to 35 deaths per 1,000 live births. Further, polio, a disease that affected over 200,000 Indian children annually during the 1980s, had been fully eradicated, until cases surfaced in January 2017 (Photo: A healthcare worker administers a polio vaccine to an Indian child in 2002).

Despite these advances, India has some of the world's highest instances of communicable diseases including tuberculosis, typhoid, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS. Further, pervasive poverty causes widespread malnutrition and hinders many people's access to healthcare. Notably, as many as 33% of Indian children under the age of 5 are underweight and 16% are severely malnourished. Demographic trends seem poised to burden the healthcare system even further with rising costs and increasing demand in the coming years.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from the beliefs, experiences, and theories of the native population. Composed primarily of 3 approaches, traditional Indian medicine emphasizes the use of nutrition, exercise, and herbal remedies, rather than surgical methods, to identify and treat the basic causes of illness.

First described in the ancient texts from around 300 BC, the ***Ayurvedic*** system ("science of life" in Sanskrit), looks to stabilize and rejuvenate the 3 main bodily energies, or ***doshas***, of air, bile, and phlegm. Treatments include eating foods based on body type, physical exercise, yoga, and meditation.

Siddha medicine, used primarily in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, also aims to properly balance the body, mind, and spirit through herbal, mineral, and animal-based remedies, as well as yoga and meditation. A 3rd system, ***Unani***, derives from Islamic traditions and focuses on treatments based on herbal remedies. Homeopathy, a form of alternative medicine developed in Germany, is also used.

Traditional medicine is popular in India, especially among patients who cannot afford basic modern procedures, vaccines, and drugs. Approximately 70% of India's rural population regularly uses traditional medicine, which most Indians consider safe and effective. A total of over 1.5 million practitioners use some form of traditional medicine within their practices. There are about 250,000 registered medical practitioners of the *Ayurvedic* system alone. Of note, India is the world's largest producer of medicinal plants.

India's Healthcare System

Although India has a network of excellent hospitals and highly trained physicians, facilities and resources are concentrated in cities, underserving rural dwellers. Further, private facilities are too expensive for most Indians, while government-run hospitals and clinics are often understaffed and poorly maintained. Staff in rural regions work long hours to keep up with the high demand. Finally, many of India's finest physicians and nurses choose to practice outside of the country to evade poor pay, rampant corruption, and lack of advancement opportunities. In 2017, India had less than 1 physician per 1,000 people, significantly lower than the US ratio of 2.6 (Photo: A slum in Mumbai)

Consequently, good healthcare is inaccessible to a large portion of the population. Even in regions where it is available, poverty and misconceptions about diseases prevent many people from going to clinics. Instead, many Indians rely on self-diagnosis and over-the-counter medications. Notably, in late 2019, less than 40% of the population subscribed to health insurance.

Health Challenges

Despite advances in its healthcare system, India remains a world leader in instances of child malnutrition, diabetes, and communicable diseases. As is common in developing countries, the rate of non-communicable disease has increased in India, accounting for 63% of all deaths.

In 2016, the top causes of death were cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, followed by diarrheal and digestive diseases, tuberculosis, diabetes, and kidney disease. Preventable "external causes," such as car accidents, resulted in about 11% of deaths. In 2019, India had the region's highest suicide rate, with 16.5 out of 100,000 people taking their own lives. Notably, suicide is the leading cause of death among Indians age 15-29 and is most prevalent among young Indian women.

Further, improper waste management, contaminated drinking water, and air pollution contribute to more than 1 million deaths per year. Trash is rarely disposed of properly and litters city streets. Those without access to clean water risk infection from parasites and bacteria and associated waterborne diseases, such as hepatitis or typhoid. Monsoonal rains that cause rivers to overflow into the streets worsen this problem. Further, mosquitoes, which breed in still water, spread serious diseases like malaria and dengue fever (Photo: Students give instruction regarding mosquito-borne illnesses).

HIV/AIDS: Nearly 2.1 million Indians from all levels of society are infected with HIV. This 0.2% infection rate is relatively low, yet South Asia's highest. Despite heavy investment in HIV awareness and prevention over the last 20 years, many health workers remain unaware of the dangers of the disease. Their unawareness only serves to promote HIV transmission through their use of unsterilized needles and blood transfusions from infected donors. In 2017, observers estimated that only 56% of infected Indians were receiving adequate treatment due to a shortage of testing kits and medicine.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Immediately following independence in 1947 (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), India adopted rigorous economic policies intended to achieve the country's self-sufficiency. Over the next 4 decades, India developed a broad and diversified agricultural and industrial base, while simultaneously limiting international trade (Photo: Mumbai city center).

By the early 1990s, economic growth had stalled despite these measures. In response, the government began to liberalize its policies. Adopting a series of free market reforms, India deregulated industries, privatized large state-owned enterprises, and reduced previously strict controls on investment and foreign trade. As a result, the economy expanded quickly, growing on average by 7% per year between 1997-2018.

As the economy grew, a new and thriving middle class emerged. Motivated young Indians carved out new entrepreneurial jobs in engineering, software development, and finance. India became a leading exporter of high-technology services by the early 2000s. These new and attractive employment opportunities coupled with India's lower cost of living began to draw educated Indians living abroad back home, further supporting middle-class growth.

Today, India has a large and diversified economy encompassing agriculture, a modern industrial sector, and a large services sector. There are also a variety of cottage industries specializing in traditional village farming and handicrafts, among others. With about 861 million Indians of working age, experts predict India's economy will become the world's 2nd largest, behind China, by 2050.

Despite this recent growth, poverty continues to plague much of India, which has the world's largest concentration of poor

people. The average Indian's annual salary is just $7,763, compared with $18,237 in China and $62,794 in the US.

Two-thirds of people in India live in poverty: 68.8% of the Indian population lives on less than $2 a day. Over 30% have less than $1.25 per day available. Poverty disproportionately affects Indian children: 40% of children under age 5 are underweight – twice the rate of sub-Saharan Africa. Much of the rural population survives through subsistence agriculture. The urban poor live in slums, serving the wealthy and middle class as porters, domestic help, drivers, and vendors.

Although the poverty rate is declining slowly (about 1% per year), India faces food, energy, and resource constraints as its population continues to grow. Further, widespread corruption and inadequate education, health, transport, and social infrastructures threaten to strain the economy in coming years.

Services

Accounting for 49% of GDP and 32% of employment, the services sector is the largest and fastest growing component of India's economy. Primary services industries include retail and commercial sales, tourism, and information technology and financial services. While large department stores have taken hold in India in recent years, small, traditional shops still account for most retail sales.

Tourism: India's tourism directly accounts for 8.1% of employment and 11% of GDP. Tourism has grown steadily over the past several years, increasing from about 2.2 million arrivals in 1997 to nearly 17.4 million in 2018. American and British visitors accounted for over 1/5th of all visitors in 2018, while Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Canadian, Australian, and Malaysian tourists accounted for much of the remainder (Photo: Malabar coast in the state of Kerala).

Industry

As the 2nd largest component of the economy, the industrial sector, including manufacturing and construction, accounts for 27% of GDP and 25% of employment.

Manufacturing: Manufacturing is the most prominent component of the industrial sector, accounting for 15% of GDP. Indian companies manufacture a variety of products, including electronics, textiles, food and beverage products, chemicals, and transportation equipment. Based on the Indian government's plan to improve manufacturing infrastructure and promote foreign investment over the next decade, experts predict this component will comprise 30% of GDP by 2025.

Construction: Construction is also a key component of India's industrial sector, making up approximately 8% of GDP. Private and public investments in large residential and public infrastructure projects have spurred construction industry growth rates to about 10% per year since 2010. Accordingly, experts predict that India's construction market will become the world's 3rd largest by 2025. Of note, many Indian women are employed as construction workers.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector consists of farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry and accounts for 43% of employment and 15% of GDP. Most agricultural activity occurs on small, family-owned farms (Photo: Female farmer in Kerala).

Farming: More than half of India's territory is dedicated to cultivation. In more fertile regions, such as the central plains and along the deltas of the eastern coast, more than 90% of land is used for farming. Notable food crops include rice, wheat, tea, sugarcane, lentils, onions, and potatoes. The primary cash crops are cotton, oilseed, and jute.

Livestock and Fishing: India's most common livestock are cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry. Fishing is practiced in coastal fisheries, along India's many rivers, and on inland fish farms. Major marine catches include sardines and mackerel, while carp dominate freshwater catches. Kerala is the leading fishing state.

Forestry: Because many of India's forests have been cleared for agricultural use, the commercial timber industry is small and limited to the Western Ghats, western Himalayas, and plains of central India. Commercial timber harvests include teak, deodar, sal, sissoo, and chir pine. Rural dwellers use virtually any woody vegetation for firewood and to make charcoal.

Currency

India's currency is the Indian rupee (₹), issued in 7 banknote values (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, 1,000) and 3 coin values (1, 2, 5). 1₹ subdivides into 100 paise, issued in 1 coin value (50). Although exchange rates vary, $1 has been worth an average of about ₹62.21 over the last 5 years; ₹76.14 in 2020. Some larger businesses accept credit cards. Vendors, small shops, and restaurants typically require payment in cash.

Foreign Trade

In 2018, India's exports totaled $324.8 billion and imports $514.5 billion. Exports included petroleum products, precious stones, machinery, iron and steel, chemicals, vehicles, cereal, and apparel. The largest buyers included the US (16%), United Arab Emirates (UAE) (9%), and China (5%). India's top imports included crude oil, precious stones, machinery, fertilizer, iron and steel, and chemicals purchased from China (15%), the US (6%), UAE (5%), Saudi Arabia (6%), and Iraq (5%) (Photo: Market in Mumbai).

Foreign Aid

The recipient of over $65.1 billion in US aid between 1946-2012, India is historically one of the world's largest foreign aid recipients. The US provided India with $109.2 million of assistance in 2018 and $92.2 million in 2019. Funding is allocated to health projects, environmental sustainability projects, economic development, education and social services, program management, and peace and security projects. Recently, India has transformed into an aid provider with a foreign aid budget of $1.18 million for the period 2018-2019, most of which was directed to its neighbors.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Despite ongoing technological improvements, India struggles to maintain an adequate physical infrastructure and energy supply to support its vast geography and growing economy. In recent decades, India has adopted modern telecommunications and information technology.

Transportation

Besides walking, the most common methods of everyday transport in India are public buses and small vehicles, including private cars, taxis, motorbikes, and auto or cycle rickshaws (pictured). Of note, car ownership is a privilege enjoyed primarily by wealthier Indians, who often employ drivers to navigate the chaotic urban traffic.

Many Indians ride motorbikes, including motorcycles and mopeds. Entire families may travel by motorbike, with the father driving and the mother sitting sidesaddle with one or more children on her lap. In addition to extensive public bus systems, some cities offer metro, monorail, and light rail public transportation systems. Delhi, Kolkata, and Gurgaon have subway systems while Chennai has an elevated light rail line.

Roadways: India had over 3.4 million mi of roadways in 2017, about 47% of which were paved. National and state highways and expressways presently account for less than 5% of the country's total roadways. Of these, the government has recently completed new 4- and 6-lane highways. Generally, India's roads are notoriously poor, with only about 20% of roads rated in fair condition. Monsoon-related flooding commonly restricts road access for 40% of the population, particularly in the North and Northeast. Travel in rural areas is commonly slowed or obstructed by carts, scooters, rickshaws, and livestock such as cows and goats.

Railways: India's extensive railway network is Asia's largest and the world's 2nd largest. It consists of over 70,000 mi of railroad and 7,500 trains serving over 7,000 stations. India's railways transport approximately 20 million passengers daily and about 30% of India's freight. State-owned and operated by the Ministry of Railways, Indian Railways (IR) subsidizes its low cost passenger fares through its freight business. Generally, IR classifies trains by speed and number of stops, offering several classes of travel. For example, non-stop express trains connect major cities in air-conditioned comfort. Local versions make frequent stops and offer only unreserved seating in un-air-conditioned compartments (Photo: Varanasi Train Station).

Ports and Waterways: India's major sea ports include Kandla, the Jawaharlal Nehru Port south of Mumbai, Mumbai, Marmagao, Panambur, and Cochin on the west coast and Tuticorin, Chennai, Vizag, Paradip, and Haldia, on the east coast. India has about 9,000 mi of inland waterways navigable by mechanized vessels.

Airways: India has 346 airports, of which 253 have paved runways, and 12 provide international service. Delhi and Mumbai airports handle 50% of the country's air traffic. India's national carrier is Air India. Spicejet, IndiGo, and Jet Airways also service domestic routes.

Energy

Since 2016, total primary energy consumption in India has been the third highest in the world after China and the US. India produces its energy primarily from coal (44%), petroleum (25%), natural gas (5%), and biomass and renewables (24%). India imports most of its required hydrocarbons, primarily from the Middle East. Coal fuels almost 60% of India's electricity generation capacity, followed by hydropower (14%), other renewable sources (18%), and natural gas (8%). Demand for electricity regularly outpaces supply, resulting in frequent power outages, particularly in the summer when demand rises further.

Media

Indians enjoy a variety of independent media outlets, including approximately 4,700 daily newspapers in more than 300 languages. The most widely read newspapers include *The Hindu, The Times of India, The Economic Times, The Hindustan Times,* and *the Deccan Chronicle*. While media outlets generally operate without restriction, some news sources occasionally practice self-censorship in order to depict India favorably or avoid potentially offensive subjects.

Radio and TV: More than 198 million Indian households have television service. Over 150 million have access to cable services or rely on satellite providers such as Tata-Sky, Dish TV, Airtel Digital TV, and Sun Direct. The national public television network, Doordarshan, broadcasts via 20 channels at the national, state, and local levels. Government-operated and independent FM radio stations offer educational and entertainment content. The government's AM All India Radio broadcasts in 23 languages (Photo: All India Radio office in Kolkata).

Telecommunications

As of 2018, India had 1.2 billion mobile phone users compared to just 21.9 million landline telephones. While many users in urban areas have multiple mobile phone lines, the number of users among the rural population is also rapidly increasing. Primary mobile carriers include Bharti Airtel, Vodafone, and Tata DoCoMo.

Internet: As of mid-2019, about 36% of Indians accessed the Internet. In general, the government does not censor the Internet, although it occasionally monitors users. In addition, legislation permits the government to block Internet sites it deems inflammatory or offensive. In 2015, for example, the Supreme Court banned the BBC documentary *India's Daughter,* which detailed the 2012 gang rape of a young medical student (see *Sex and Gender*), and blocked its access via the Internet.

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