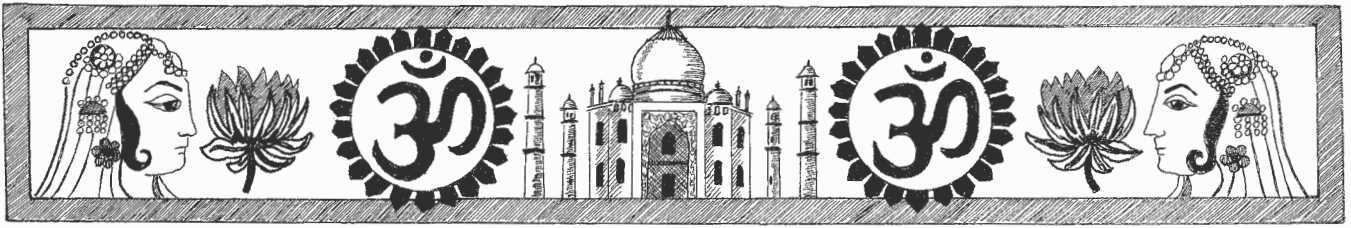


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India

From its dry, parched deserts to its snow-capped mountains, India is a land of many contrasts. Regions of India endure drenching monsoons and blistering droughts while other areas enjoy lush tropical forests and fertile plains. The people of India live lives of contrast, as well. Cities are crowded and bustling, while some villages are so isolated that the villagers may not realize there is any civilization beyond.

The people of India have a varied ancestry. Exotic spices, wood, and jewels brought traders to India from around the world. For centuries, tribe after tribe from Central Asia, Europe, and surrounding areas invaded and settled in India. Greeks, Turks, Moughals, Mongols, Portuguese, and British have all ruled India. In spite of these differences, much of India is linked through its major religion—Hinduism. Hinduism is actually more than a religion; it is a culture or a way of life. Hinduism accepts differences because of its different beliefs and practices. Other religious groups have sprung from Hinduism. Sikhs, Jains, and others live side-by-side with Hindus. In this accepting way, many people of India live together in a country full of diversity.

Indian national symbol

Official Name—Republic of India, India, Hindustan, or *Bharat*, the Hindi name for India

Area—3,287,590 square kilometers
(1,269,218 square miles)

Population—Approximately 850,000,000
75% in rural areas, 25% in cities

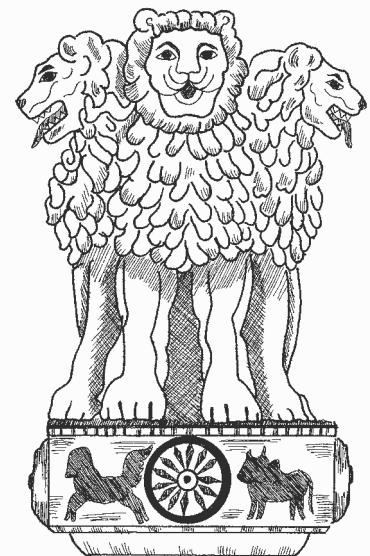
Capital City—New Delhi

Largest City—Bombay

Territory—22 states and 9 union territories

Government—Democratic Republic with a bicameral (upper and lower house) Parliament based on the British model of government. India elects a president, but it is the Council of Ministers, under the leadership of the prime minister, which makes decisions for government.

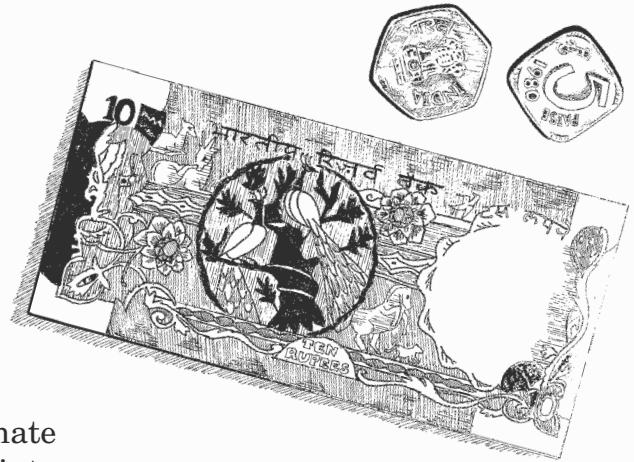
Language—Hindi is the national language. Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada,



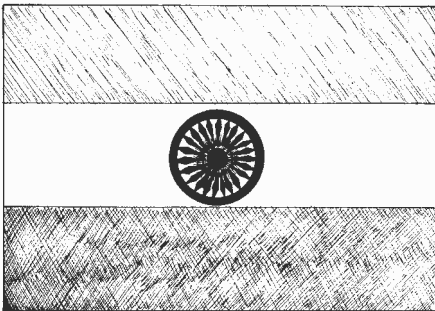
Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu are also official languages.

Religion—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism

Currency—Indians use rupees and paisa. One rupee is divided into 100 paisa. There are coins of 5, 10, 25, and 50 paisa, and 1, 2, and 5 rupees. There are notes of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 rupees. The rate of exchange varies but a rupee might be worth 3 to 4 U.S. cents, or around 35 rupees to one dollar.



Climate—Mainly tropical, monsoon climate with severe changes between seasons: winter, spring, summer, autumn, and monsoon.



Flag—Consists of three horizontal stripes—orange, white, and green with a blue wheel in the center of the white stripe. A traditional interpretation is that the orange stripe represents purity or holiness, the green stripe represents prosperity, and the white stripe represents peace. The wheel is an ancient Buddhist symbol which represents peaceful change. The flag was adopted in 1947.

Physical Features

India is known as a subcontinent, and is divided into three main topographic regions. Mountain ranges dominate northern India. The Himalayan Mountain range in the north is the highest mountain range in the world, and its adjoining Karakoram and Hindu Kush ranges are equally impressive. Below the mountain ranges are the Northern Plains. These dry, desert plains, with their nomads and wind-swept villages, stretch from Pakistan in the west to Bangladesh in the east. The third region is known as Peninsular India. It is one of the oldest parts of India and it reaches from the coast in the west to the jungles in the east. Rich, black soil makes cotton a profitable crop in the north part of the Deccan plain, while the southern soil is poor and good only for grazing. The Deccan is bordered on either side by the Eastern and Western Ghats, mountain ranges which form the coastlines of southern peninsular India. The exotic southern coasts are full of thick teak and sandalwood forests and wild elephants. Cape Comorin, the southernmost part of India, is where the white sand of the Arabian Sea, the black sand of the bay of Bengal, and the red sand of the Indian Ocean meet.