



*Weapons-range safety explained  
Flickr / U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael J. MacLeod*

**AUGUST 2016**

## **Hindi Cultural Orientation**



# Hindi Cultural Orientation Contents

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*New Delhices*

*Flickr / Francois Decaillet*

## CHAPTER 1

# Profile

## Introduction

Hindi is one of two official languages of India and is the fourth most widely spoken language in the world. Approximately 425 million speak Hindi as a first language and an additional 120 million speak it as a second language.<sup>1,2</sup> Descended from the ancient Sanskrit language, Hindi contains influences from Persian, Turkish, Farsi, Arabic, Portuguese, and even English. It is closely related to Bengali, Punjabi, and Gujarati, and is quite similar to Urdu—the two are almost completely mutually intelligible when spoken.<sup>3,4</sup> Hindi is primarily spoken in most parts of the Gangetic Plain, as well as in



north central India. Hindi is the predominant language in the union territory of Delhi and the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>5</sup>

India is the world's largest democracy, and is enduring despite striking polarizations in religion, language, class, and caste.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Geographically, the nation contains a variety of terrains and climates.<sup>9,10</sup> With a population of over 1 billion, India is a linguistic mosaic in which even less common languages are spoken by hundreds of thousands of people.<sup>11,12</sup> Economically, India has recently redefined itself as a center for high-tech operations and outsourcing, and is poised to become one of the world's largest economies over the next few decades.<sup>13</sup>

## Geography

India is part of the larger Indian Subcontinent, which makes up most of South Asia. The country is about one-third the size of the United States. It is surrounded by Pakistan to the northwest; Nepal, Bhutan, and China to the northeast; and Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar) to the east. India's topography ranges from the highest mountain chain in the world to sandy beaches and tropical rainforests.<sup>14</sup>

### Area

India is the seventh-largest country in the world in area. India's total land mass is 3,287,263 sq km (1,282,033 sq mi), including two offshore island chains. Its 7,000 km (4,340 mi) of coastline adjoin three bodies of water: the Arabian Sea off its western coast, the Indian Ocean to its south, and the Bay of Bengal on its eastern side.<sup>15, 16</sup>

India is divided into seven main geographic regions.<sup>17</sup> From north to south, they are the Northern Mountains, the Great Plains, the Central Highlands, the Peninsular Plateau (also called the Deccan Plateau), the East Coast, the West Coast, and the offshore islands. The offshore islands are in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. Some consider the Great Indian Desert (also known as the Thar Desert) and the Rann of Kutch area in western India to be an eighth



*Farmland in the Deccan Plateau  
Flickr / Anannya Deb*

region.<sup>18</sup> The Northern Mountains, the Great Plains, the Central Highlands, and the Thar Desert are home to the majority of Hindi speakers in the country.<sup>19</sup>

### *Geographic Divisions*

The Indian mainland comprises three main regions: the great Himalayan mountain range; the plains of the Ganga and Indus rivers, including the western desert region; and the southern Peninsula. Hindi speakers occupy much of the first two regions.<sup>20</sup> Hindi



*Himalayan mountain range  
Flickr / Sam Hawley*

is spoken mainly in the northern part of the country, which encompasses most of the Himalayan and Plains geographic areas.<sup>21</sup>

### *Himalayas*

Around 50 million years ago, the Indian Plate moved northward and collided with the Eurasian Plate. The leading edge of the Indian Plate moved under the Eurasian Plate, elevating an area on the Eurasian Plate referred to as the “Tibetan Plateau.” On the Indian Plate, the crust compressed, buckled, and folded to create a wall of mountains known as the Himalayas.<sup>22</sup> The two plates continue to merge, with the Himalayas rising about 5 mm (0.2 in) each year.<sup>23, 24</sup> Some of the highest peaks in the world are found in the Himalayas and adjoining ranges.<sup>25</sup>

The vegetation in the Himalayas varies from tropical rainforests in the east to subtropical and alpine forests in the central and western Himalayas. In Jammu and Kashmir, between the Greater Himalayas and the Karakoram Range to their north, lies Ladakh, which is a cold, desert-like region with limited vegetation.<sup>26, 27</sup>

### *The Western Desert Region*

Called the Great Indian Desert, the northwestern part of India is defined largely by the Thar Desert, an area of 200,000 sq km (78,000 sq mi). Partly located in Pakistan, the



*Camels in the Great Indian Desert*  
*Flickr / saicachorro*

Thar is bordered by the Indus plain on the west, the Aravalli Range on the southeast, the Punjab plain to the north and northeast, and the Arabian Sea and the Rann of Kutch on the south.<sup>28, 29</sup>

### *Indo-Gangetic Plain*

South of the Himalayas lies the Gangetic Plain, a belt of flat, alluvial lowlands. It ranges from 280 to 400 km (175 to 250 mi) wide. This region is one of the world's greatest flat plains. The Plain lies on a former seabed that is now covered by alluvial soil (brought by the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers) that is 1,830 m (6,000 ft) deep in some places.<sup>30</sup> It is wet in the east, and becomes progressively drier toward the west until reaching the aridness of the Thar Desert, at the Plain's southwestern end.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Indian Peninsula and Deccan Plateau*

The Deccan Plateau forms the southern part of the Indian Peninsula. The word "Deccan" comes from a Sanskrit word *daksina*, meaning "south." The Plateau traditionally has



*Millet farmers in the  
Deccan Plateau*  
*Flickr / ICRISAT*

been defined as the area south of the Vindhya and Satpura ranges, which parallel the Narmada River to the north and south, respectively. The Deccan is flanked by two coastal ranges, the Eastern and Western Ghats. The average height of the Eastern Ghats is about 600 m (1,968 ft), while the Western Ghats typically top off at 1,000 m (3,280 ft), although some peaks rise above 2,000 m (6,560 ft).<sup>32, 33, 34, 35, 36</sup>

## Climate

Two of the greatest influences on India's climate are the Himalayas that block cold air coming from Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean.<sup>37</sup> Temperatures and climate vary with altitude in the Himalayas. At 2,000 m (6,560 ft), the summer temperatures average about 18°C (64°F), but near 4,500 meters (14,760 feet) the temperature rarely rises above 0°C (32°F).<sup>38</sup> There are record below-freezing temperatures during the Himalayan winters. In the arid Thar Desert, temperatures range from near freezing in the winter to over 50°C (122°F) in the summer. Along the eastern and western coasts, the climate is tropical, damp, and rainy.<sup>39, 40, 41</sup>

The Indian Meteorological Department divides the year into four distinct seasons. Winter is dry and cool from December through February; summer is dry and hot from March through May. The other two seasons are the southwest monsoon season (June through September) and the dry northeast monsoons (October and November).<sup>42</sup>

### *The Monsoon*

Life in India revolves around the annual monsoon season because of its impact on the land and people. The southwest monsoon usually arrives by sea from the west of India, in early June, and then moves toward the northwest. An eastern branch of the monsoon moves northward from the Bay of Bengal, bringing sometimes torrential rains and flooding to the low-lying areas of eastern India and Bangladesh. This eastern monsoon is blocked by the Himalayas, so it ultimately turns toward the west and northwest.<sup>43</sup>

The northeast monsoon is far slower than its spring predecessor. It usually moves across northwest India in early

October and recedes by the end of November. Most of the country only receives low to moderate rainfall during this period, except for coastal areas along the southern tip of the Indian peninsula.<sup>44</sup>

India receives about 80% of its precipitation during the monsoon period. Average annual rainfall is about 121.5 cm (48 in), but that may range from less than 10 cm (4 in) in the western Thar Desert region to more than 250 cm (99 in) in the northeastern part of the country.<sup>45, 46, 47</sup>



*Cloudy sky before a monsoon*  
*Flickr / Bobinson K B*

## Rivers

There are three major river basins in India. They are the Ganga, 2,510 km (1,556 mi) long; the Indus, 3,180 km (1,971 mi) long; and the Brahmaputra, 2,950 km (1,829 mi) long. Some of the world's largest stretches of flat alluvial soils have been produced in the drainage basins of these rivers. Furthermore, these rivers flow through some of the most densely populated areas on earth.<sup>48</sup> All of India's rivers—with the exception of Brahmaputra—are named for Hindu goddesses.<sup>49</sup>

The rivers of India can be classified by their origin: Himalayan, peninsular, coastal, and inland. Typically, the Himalayan rivers are snow-fed and run year-round. Peninsular rivers depend on the monsoons. Coastal rivers tend to be short with small basins. The inland drainage rivers of the Rajasthan Desert area are few, short-lived, and mostly disappear into sand.<sup>50, 51</sup> Only two major rivers flow from the east to the Arabian Sea in the west: the Narmada and the Tapi.<sup>52</sup>

### *Indus River Basin*

Socially, historically, and economically, the Indo-Gangetic Basin is the most important river basin in India. The Indus River Basin was the cradle of South Asia's great Indus Valley Civilization. Beginning at an altitude of 4,877 m (16,000 ft), the river flows northwesterly through the Himalayas into the Ladakh Range of the Northern Areas of Kashmir before dropping south into Punjab in Pakistan. When the Indus reaches the plains below the Himalayas, it is joined by the five famous tributaries—the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej—that give Punjab its name (“*five waters*”). The Indus finally empties into the Arabian Sea southeast of Karachi in Pakistan.<sup>53, 54, 55</sup>



*Indus River*  
*Flickr / Prabhu B Doss*

### *Ganga (Ganges) River Basin*



The Ganga River Basin is India's largest river basin, bounded by the Himalayas in the north and the Vindhya Range to the south. The basin has two main headwaters on the Indian side of the Himalayas. They are the Bhagirathi River, originating from the Gangotri Glacier at Goumukh (“*cow's mouth*”), and the Alaknanda River, rising from near the Alkapuri glacier.<sup>56, 57, 58</sup>

*Morning prayer in the Ganga River*  
*Flickr / Tine Steiss*

The Ganga watershed supports more than 500 million people living along its banks. Many Indians believe the legendary source of the Ganga River in Gangotri is “holy” water. Lore has it that King Bhagirath was penitent for the sins of his predecessors. In response to his penance, the goddess Ganga came to earth in the form of water to absolve the sins. Pilgrimages are made during the non-winter months to a temple near Gangotri in honor of this legend.<sup>59, 60</sup>

### *Yamuna River*

The Yamuna rises from Yamunotri Glacier in the Tehri Garhwal District of the Himalayas. It flows for about 1,380 km (856 mi) almost parallel to the Ganga until they meet at Allahabad. The area along the Yamuna River has been considered one of the most fertile areas in the subcontinent, although the river is one of India’s most polluted. India’s capital, New Delhi, lies on the Yamuna River.<sup>61, 62, 63</sup>



*Yamuna River during Magh Mela Festival  
Flickr / Adam Jones*

### *Brahmaputra River*

The Brahmaputra River rises in the northern Himalayas in western Tibet and flows eastward for nearly 1,700 km (1,054 mi) before turning south near the Indian border. Its elevation then drops rapidly and it flows southwestward. In western Assam State, the Brahmaputra again turns toward the south and flows into Bangladesh. It is one of the longest rivers of the world at 2,900 km (1,800 mi). The



*Brahmaputra River  
Flickr / Rita Willaert*

Brahmaputra has the greatest volume of water of all Indian rivers as a result of the heavy monsoon rainfall flowing into it.<sup>64</sup> It carries a heavy load of silt and, together with the Ganga River, forms one of the largest river deltas in the world.<sup>65</sup> A unique feature of this river is that most of it is navigable, even at elevations of 3,048 m (10,000 ft).<sup>66, 67, 68</sup>

## *Godavari River*

The Godavari River begins northeast of Mumbai and follows a southeasterly course for about 1,450 km (900 mi) before flowing into the Bay of Bengal off the coast of Andhra Pradesh. The delta area of the Godavari, which connects to the Krishna River via an irrigation-canal system, is one of the country's main rice-growing areas.<sup>69,70</sup>

## *Mahanadi River*

The Mahanadi River, which irrigates crops of sugar cane, rice, and oilseed, is 900 km (560 mi) long and originates in Chhattisgarh State. From there it runs north, and then east through the Eastern Ghats before entering the Bay of Bengal near Cuttack.<sup>71,72,73</sup>

## **Major Cities**

### *Delhi/New Delhi*

The metropolis of Delhi, also referred to as the National Capitol Territory (NCT) of Delhi, actually comprises multiple urban areas. The capital and seat of India's government, New Delhi, is just one of the urban areas within the NCT. Delhi is one of the world's oldest inhabited cities: archaeological evidence dates to 300 B.C.E. The geographic position of Delhi in northern India has long allowed it to command India's major trade routes.<sup>74,75</sup>



*Marketplace in Delhi  
Flickr / Ville Miettinen*

### *Mumbai (Bombay)*

Since India's independence from Britain in 1947, a number of cities have changed their names from the British anglicized forms. Foremost among these is Bombay, which in 1995 became Mumbai, named for the goddess Mumba. Mumbai is the capital of the state of Mararashtra, and is built on a set of seven



*Laundry service, Mumbai  
Flickr / Dennis Jarvis*

islands. Just over 11% of its population speaks Hindi.<sup>76</sup> It is the country's business capital, its principal financial and communications center, and its largest and busiest port, managing nearly 40% of India's maritime commerce. Mumbai is also the home of "Bollywood" (India's Hollywood counterpart), where over 1,000 films are produced each year, most of them in Hindi.<sup>77, 78</sup>

### *Benares (Varanasi)*

Benares is considered the most sacred city in India. It sits on the banks of the Ganga River in the state of Uttar Pradesh and is more than 3,000 years old. It is thought to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. With temples located every few steps, Benares is known as the city of temples. The most famous pilgrimage site in the city is the Ganga (Ganges) River, where people gather to wash away their sins.<sup>79, 80, 81</sup>



*Street scene in Benares at night  
Flickr / Hendrik Terbeck*

## History

India's ancient and complex history dates at least 5,000 years to the emergence of the Indus Valley Civilization. Through the centuries, people invaded or migrated to India, and began contributing to what has now emerged as a diverse culture.

### *Early History*

Two theories have emerged to account for the rise of the Indus River Civilization around 1500 B.C.E. Some argue that Aryan tribes from the northwest invaded the Indus River Valley, merging with the earlier inhabitants and initiating the formation of what is considered today as the classical Indian (*Vedic*) culture. Other, more recent, re-interpretations from India have reversed the Aryan invasion theory, arguing that indigenous Aryans in the Indus River Valley spread their culture northward and westward into adjoining regions (the so-called "Out of India theory").<sup>82</sup> These arguments reflect how modern Indians view their collective cultural identity. Dissenters note that the Aryan invasion theory has been used to assert that the pre-Aryan Indus River dwellers were driven southward by the invasion, thus dividing the subcontinent into northern Aryan and southern Dravidian cultures. This north-south cultural divide is still felt today. Those opposing the invasion theory propose instead that the Indus River people migrated south because of the drying up of a massive prehistoric river, the Saraswati.<sup>83, 84, 85, 86</sup>



*Bust of  
Alexander the Great  
Wikimedia /  
Andrew Dunn*



Brief invasions by the Persians, and later the Greeks (led by Alexander the Great), between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.E. primarily affected the Indus River Valley and Punjab. Toward the end of this period, the Magadha king Chandragupta Maurya began to extend his kingdom to adjoining regions. By the time his grandson Ashoka the Great came to rule (around 270 B.C.E.), the Mauryan Empire extended across all but the southernmost end of the Indian subcontinent. It is considered one of the greatest empires in Indian history.<sup>87</sup>

### Medieval History

After the breakup of the Mauryan Empire, several centuries passed in which much of India was ruled by local kingdoms that struggled against one another for dominance.



Entrance to Fatepuhr  
Sikri complex  
Wikimedia /  
Marcin Bialek

During the fourth century C.E., most of northern India was reunited into the Gupta Empire. This period is sometimes called the Golden Age, a time when Hindu culture, science, and arts flourished.<sup>88, 89, 90</sup>

In 711, Arab military forces conquered the Indian province of Sindh (now in modern Pakistan) and established an Indo-Muslim state. By the end of the 10th century, Central Asian Turkish tribes, who were recent converts to Islam, started moving into northwest India. By the early 13th century, a Turkish kingdom was established in Delhi, but internal conflicts and political assassinations plagued the Sultanate and reduced the extent of its reach.<sup>91</sup> On the heels of this tumultuous period came the

Mughal Empire, founded in 1526. This kingdom was later built upon and consolidated, in part by reconciling with and assimilating the large Hindu population. As part of this effort, a code of moral ethics, called *Din-i-Ilahi* (Divine Faith), was promoted. This code endorsed acceptance of all religions and sects. Even the architecture of this period reflects a blending of Hindu and Muslim features, most notably in the Mughal royal city of Fatepuhr Sikri near Agra, which today is a World Heritage Site.<sup>92, 93, 94, 95</sup>

### Colonial History

In 1498, Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama landed on the western coast of India; 12 years later, the Portuguese defeated the local sultan's forces and seized control of the port of Goa.<sup>96</sup> The Portuguese eventually established a chain of outposts along India's western coast, but by the early 18th century, only Goa and the smaller towns of Diu and Daman (coastal enclaves in modern Gujarat state) remained of the Portuguese colonial territories.<sup>97</sup>

The British and the Dutch chartered private trading companies to break Portuguese control of trade. The British East India Company was formally founded in 1600, followed by the Dutch United East India Company in 1602.<sup>98</sup> Local Indian rulers, most of whom were Muslim, authorized the Dutch and English to trade in their ports,



Vasco da Gama  
Wikimedia /  
Daniel Villafruela

hopeful of pitting the new companies against the anti-Islamic Portuguese.<sup>99</sup> The British defeated the Portuguese in 1612, breaking its trading monopoly. The French, Danish, and Austrians all subsequently established themselves in India. In 1751, a small force of British soldiers led military actions against the French, which resulted in a local power shift to Indian rulers, who were beholden to British East India Company interests. By 1763, France's colonial possessions in India were reduced to Pondicherry (south of Madras) and a few smaller outposts.<sup>100</sup>

### *British India (1757–1857)*

From 1757 until 1857, the British East India Company expanded aggressively. The attitude of the British toward Indian culture changed from admiration and appreciation to a feeling of superiority and a “mission to civilize.” This manifested in India through missionary efforts in publishing, schools, orphanages, vocational institutions, dispensaries, and hospitals.<sup>101, 102</sup>



*Depiction of the Sepoy Rebellion*  
Wikimedia / William Simpson, E Walker

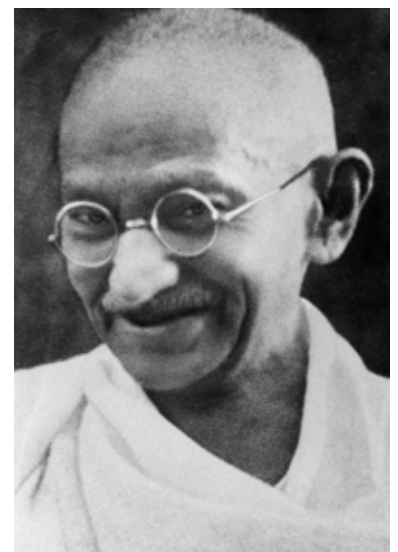
In 1856, during the Sepoy Rebellion, some Indian soldiers of the British Indian Army mutinied in the Meerut garrison, northeast of Delhi. The rebels quickly offered their services to the Mughal emperor in Delhi. The Sepoys began a yearlong war against the British that engulfed all of northern India.<sup>103</sup> The British eventually stifled the insurrection and drove the rebels into Nepal, but it was a major turn in the British occupation of India. In 1858, the British banished the Mughal Emperor, liquidated the British East India Company, and adopted direct rule by the British government.<sup>104, 105</sup>

### *Road to Independence*

In 1885, an Indian National Congress (INC) met to consider India's role in civil rights and government. By 1900, the INC had become a truly all-Indian political organization, with one exception: few Muslims belonged to it. In 1906, the All-India Muslim League was founded as a counterbalance to the INC.<sup>106</sup>

After World War I, the Government of India Act of 1919 allowed power sharing between appointed British officials and elected Indians. Yet at the same time, the

*Mohandas Gandhi*  
Flickr / Alle



British approved the Rowlatt Acts, which empowered the government to silence the press, detain political activists without trial, and make arrests without warrants.<sup>107</sup> The passage of the Acts led to a nationwide work stoppage called by Mohandas Gandhi.<sup>108</sup>

Gandhi chose a path of nonviolent civil disobedience to challenge British authority. Under his leadership, the Indian National Congress passed a new constitution with the goal of self-rule, or *swaraj*. He urged the country to boycott all British institutions, laws, and products; to refuse to pay taxes; and to discard British titles and honors—forcing the British to inexorably move forward on further reform legislation, and leading to the first provincial elections in India in 1937.<sup>109, 110, 111</sup>

### *Independence*

As India inched toward self-rule in the 1930s, the divide between the Muslim League and the INC widened.<sup>112, 113</sup> On 15 August 1947, the British granted independence and established the separate nations of India and Pakistan. Rioting, rapes, and massacres took place after the partition as Muslims in India were forced to the Pakistan side of the border and Hindus in Pakistani regions were forced in the opposite direction. Over 10 million people relocated, and some estimate that at least 1 million people died.<sup>114, 115</sup>

The partition of greater India also led to a conflict that remains unresolved: the fate of the Kashmir region. Because Kashmir was a pre-Independence princely state, the terms of the India-Pakistan partition stated that the king of the predominantly Muslim region should choose which country the kingdom would join. The king signed the Instrument of Accession in October 1947 ceding the kingdom to India. But Pakistan claimed that the Maharaja signed under pressure from India and against the terms of a Pakistan-Kashmir Standstill Agreement. Several wars later, Pakistan and India still claim Kashmir as their own. The “line of control,” a mostly unchanged remnant of the first Indo-Pakistani war, today separates the Pakistani-controlled areas of Kashmir from India-controlled areas. It has become the *de facto* boundary between the two countries in this volatile region. Conflicts in this region continue to this day.<sup>116, 117, 118, 119, 120</sup>

### *Recent Events*

More than 60 years after independence, India remains the world’s most populous democracy. Perhaps no other country contains such a montage of languages and religions—a situation that also leads to sporadic violence and secessionist movements. Numerous new states have been carved from existing Indian states since independence, mostly to better align political boundaries with linguistic regions.<sup>121</sup>

With its huge population and strategic location, India has become a key player in the region. Relations with Pakistan remain a critical concern. Since 2004, the two countries have been involved in peace negotiations. But since the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, the talks have stalled.<sup>122, 123, 124</sup> Tensions with Pakistan over Kashmir border issues



*Trash in streets of Brahmaputra  
Flickr / Rita Willaert*

simmer.<sup>125, 126</sup> In 2011, India was named the world's largest arms importer, further heightening concerns among its neighbors.<sup>127</sup>

India's rising population and growing economic power have placed it in a key position in the world. Still plagued by high illiteracy rates, tensions on its borders, extensive poverty, and environmental concerns, India is center stage. In 2011, the country gained a nonpermanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2011 and 2012 term. Tensions continue between Pakistan and India over their dispute of Kashmir; each side has postured aggressively, and people fear a confrontation between the two nuclear powers.<sup>128, 129</sup>



*Pranab Mukherjee,  
President of India  
Flickr / U.S. Department  
of the Treasury*

## Government

Although India is the world's largest democracy, its brand of governance is distinct from that of Western democracies. Because of the significant divisions within the country, the central government has never been given a great deal of authority. As a result, the balance of power lies more in the hands of the states. Though the country often has political protests, they are rarely against the government. Instead, they are against the existing social order, or they are religious movements. The Indian government is simply seen as irrelevant to the lives of most Indians and as unresponsive to social change.<sup>130</sup>

### *Administrative Divisions*

India is divided into 29 states comprised of 583 districts; 7 union territories; and a national capital territory. Districts within each state are subdivided into *taluqs* or *tehsils*, each containing from 200 to 600 villages.<sup>131, 132</sup>

### *Executive*

The Presidency is defined in theory to be a powerful position, granting the capability to appoint the Prime Minister, cabinet members, governors, Supreme Court and high court justices, and ambassadors. Yet in practice the position is mostly symbolic, and true power resides with the Prime Minister, who is elected by the party that controls the Legislature (directly or in a coalition).<sup>133</sup>

### *Legislative*

The Legislature is bicameral: the upper house is the Council of States (*Rajya Sabha*) and the lower house is the House of the People (*Lok Sabha*). The Rajya Sabha comprises up to 250 directly elected members, and 12 members that the president appoints for a

6-year term. The Lok Sabha has 545 members chosen by direct election (except for 2 appointed by the President) for terms of 5 years. The Rajya Sabha is in continuous session, and not subject to dissolution like the Lok Sabha.<sup>134, 135</sup>

### *Judicial*

The Indian Supreme Court holds 25 associate justices and 1 chief justice, all appointed by the President. The Supreme Court's responsibilities are quite similar to those of the U.S. Supreme Court. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the Indian judiciary is that all courts—civil, criminal, state and local, appellate—are integrated into a single judicial system.<sup>136</sup>

### *Politics*

With nearly 714 million voters and 800,000 polling stations, Indian elections are a mammoth enterprise and take place in several phases over a 3-week span.<sup>137, 138</sup> India's most recent national elections were held in early 2014. The newly elected Prime Minister is Narendra Modi. Prime Minister Modi is a Hindu Nationalist who, since taking his position in May 2014, has sought to improve diplomatic relations with Pakistan.<sup>139, 140</sup>



*Narendra Modi,  
Prime Minister of India  
Flickr / Narendra Modi*

## **Economy**

India's economy is diverse, encompassing agriculture, a range of modern industries, and an increasing number of lucrative service-sector positions. The latter provide over half of India's GDP, though they employ only one-third of its labor force.<sup>141</sup>



Since 1994, the economy has averaged 7% growth annually (8.3% in 2010).<sup>142</sup> Business process outsourcing, such as call centers, medical transcription services, and data entry, has boomed as multinational companies take advantage of India's large number of well-educated citizens with good English skills.<sup>143</sup> Software services have also been a growth area.

*Call center  
Flickr / ILO/Benoit Marquet*

## **Agriculture**

Roughly 1,700,000 sq km (663,000 sq mi) or about 52% of India's land is farmed.<sup>144, 145</sup> Agriculture employs about 49% of India's population but only contributes about 18% of GDP.<sup>146</sup>

From the late 1960s to late 1970s, India's agricultural output increased dramatically. This so-called "Green Revolution" was highlighted by a transition to high-yield varieties of key crops such as rice and wheat (particularly in the states of Punjab and Haryana) and an expansion of irrigation capacity, allowing more acreage to be farmed and existing farmland to be double-cropped. During this period, India became for the first time a net exporter of food grains.<sup>147, 148</sup>



*Rice paddies*  
*Flickr / Ramon Casha*

### *Other Crops*

Many kinds of fruits are grown for local consumption and for export, as are more than 40 kinds of vegetables, and spices such as black pepper, cardamom, ginger, and turmeric. Plantation crops include tea, coffee, rubber, coconut, cashews, and cocoa. Flowers, both cut and potted, have recently become important, as have medicinal and aromatic plants, although total acreage remains relatively small.<sup>149, 150</sup>

## Industry

### *Services*

Service industries in India include transportation, trade, computer support, banking, insurance, real estate, public administration, hotels and restaurants, and several other areas.<sup>151</sup> Retail and wholesale trade are viewed as the most important services. Overall, it is estimated that nearly 56.9% of India's GDP (2013) is generated by the service sector.<sup>152</sup> In Delhi, about 70% of the state's domestic product is accounted for by the service industry.<sup>153</sup>

One of the most important success stories in India has been its emergence as a supplier of software and information technology-related services for the U.S. and other markets. India is ranked 12th as a destination for biotechnology industries worldwide and is 3rd in size in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>154</sup>

*Computers running Ubuntu Linux*  
*Flickr / Niyam Bhushan*



## *Manufacturing*

The manufacturing sector makes up 25.8% of India's GDP.<sup>155</sup> In 2010, India was among the top 10 manufacturing countries in the world. In Delhi, nearly one-quarter of



the state domestic product was contributed by manufacturing. Some of India's most important manufactured products include textiles, transport equipment, chemical products, basic metals, motor vehicles, machinery and equipment, and leather products.<sup>156</sup>

*Paper manufacturing  
Flickr / Dave Morris*

## *Fertilizer and Petrochemicals*

The fertilizer industry is another major industrial sector, and one that developed as an outgrowth of the Green Revolution. There are currently 57 large-scale fertilizer facilities in the country.<sup>157, 158, 159</sup>

The chemical industry in India is a large segment of the manufacturing economy. According to a 2007 report, the chemical industry contributed 3% of the country's GDP and generated nearly USD 31 billion. It has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the Indian economy.<sup>160, 161</sup>

## *Trade*

India continues to have a significant trade imbalance, largely because of oil imports. Economic reforms since 1990 have lowered some barriers to foreign trade, but not all. Indian exports have increased significantly during this period. Gems and jewelry are the largest export group by value, followed by textile goods, engineering products, basic chemicals (including pharmaceuticals and cosmetics), and leather goods. The major imported goods are coal and oil.<sup>162</sup>

## **Media**

India has more news media than any other country in the world.<sup>163</sup> Although India's constitution does not explicitly ensure freedom of the press, it does state, "all citizens have the right to freedom of speech and expression."<sup>164</sup> Cases of press censorship or intimidation have occurred, particularly during times of heightened tensions with Pakistan or in areas of the country where secessionist or resistance movements are

ongoing.<sup>165</sup> However, India is still considered a model of press freedom in South Asia, even though 2014 saw an increase in censorship from a wide array of government and social arenas.<sup>166, 167, 168</sup>

### *Newspapers*

Newspapers reach millions of people daily in India. India has hundreds of newspapers published in all the major languages of the country, and for some years, these publications experienced dramatic levels of growth.<sup>169, 170</sup> However, readership in recent years has been declining.<sup>171, 172, 173</sup>

*Newspaper*  
*Flickr / Thomas Guignard*



### *Broadcast Media*

Starting with just one state-run television channel in 1991, India has grown to a country with hundreds of channels. Between 2005 and 2010, more than 444 channels emerged, and India now has more than 700 channels. Satellite initiatives, such as direct-to-home (DTH) service with internet capability, have also begun to make significant inroads in India's broadcast marketplace. DTH is especially popular in rural regions, where the vast majority of India's citizens live and where cable is generally not available.<sup>174, 175, 176, 177</sup>

Television content is regulated by several laws covering appropriate content. These codes may prohibit any content considered likely to promote ill will or hatred, or create disharmony among the religious, racial, or linguistic groups in the country. Program content may also be restricted if it is perceived to violate common decency or good taste. An independent board has been created to monitor TV content.<sup>178, 179, 180</sup>



*Video cameras*  
*Flickr / Rethinking Religion in India*



### *Internet*

India has the third-largest internet market in the world with approximately 100 million users and is poised to attain the rank of second-largest as internet users increase.<sup>181, 182, 183</sup> India also ranks third in the world in internet censorship. The government has made numerous requests for specific sites to be removed. It also ranks fourth-highest in the world for data removal requests.<sup>184</sup>



*Students on the Internet*  
*Flickr / GPE/Deepa Srikantaiah*

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### **Ethnic Groups**

The complexity of India's multiethnic communities makes it difficult to identify ethnic groups as they might be observed in other countries. The typical markers used to

identify most ethnicities—language, territory, culture, religion, tribe, race, and perhaps caste—have been so thoroughly integrated that it is almost impossible to discern one ethnicity from another. Thus, for most ethnic maps, one or more of these markers is used to make distinctions between various groups. Politically, language has traditionally been the most important identifier of different groups of Indians. Many of the modern Indian political states have boundaries that coincide with linguistic boundaries.<sup>185</sup>



*Students in India*  
*Flickr / Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security*

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### *Languages*

There are two dominant linguistic families in India: the Indo-Aryan and the Dravidian. Hindi, an Indo-Aryan language, is one of two “official languages of the Union” (English is the other) and is spoken by approximately 600 million people. But it is not the

“national” language as is sometimes claimed. Resistance from various parts of the country, particularly Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, virtually assures that it will never achieve that status.<sup>186, 187, 188</sup> Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, is similar to Hindi and is widely spoken throughout northern India, particularly by Muslims.<sup>189</sup>

In the northern states, where Hindi is the predominant language, around 80% of the residents speak Hindi. In some states, such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, that increases to 90% or more. On the other hand, in the states of Jharkhand and Bihar, Hindi speakers make up 58% and 73% of the population, respectively.<sup>190</sup>

A much smaller group of Indians speak languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic families. Speakers of these languages are primarily located along the Himalayan fringe and in easternmost India, in the region to the east and north of Bangladesh.<sup>191</sup> A fourth linguistic group, Austro-Asiatic, is dominant in tribal regions west and north of Bangladesh.<sup>192</sup>

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# Overview

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## Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Hindi is the national language of India.

**FALSE**

Hindi is one of two official languages of India. It is spoken primarily in the northern parts of the country.

2. Slightly over half of India's land is farmed.

**TRUE**

About 52% of India's land is currently being farmed. Agriculture employs slightly more than half of the population.

3. Indian media is tightly controlled by the government.

**FALSE**

Indian media is a model of freedom in South Asia. Press censorship or intimidation has occurred during times of heightened tensions with Pakistan, or where secessionist or resistance movements are ongoing.

4. New Delhi is an important urban center.

**TRUE**

The capital and seat of India's government, New Delhi, is just one of the urban areas within the National Capital Territory.

5. The Presidency is the most powerful position in the government.

**FALSE**

Although the presidency is defined to be a powerful position, in practice more power resides with the Prime Minister.



## CHAPTER 2

*Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Calcutta  
Flickr / Asis K. Chatterjee*

# Religion

## Overview

India has often been referred to as a cradle of religions because two of the world's major religions—Hinduism and Buddhism—trace their roots to the region.<sup>1</sup> Two other significant religions, Sikhism and Jainism, are indigenous to India.<sup>2,3</sup> Besides these four religions, a multitude of animist religions are practiced in the tribal areas of eastern India.<sup>4,5</sup> The two major non-indigenous religions in India are Islam and Christianity.<sup>6,7</sup>

Nearly 926 million Indians, or 80.5%, are Hindus. The largest minority religion, Islam, is practiced by only 13.4% of the population. However, this percentage equals 177 million

people, making India's Muslim population the world's third-largest behind Indonesia and Pakistan. The Muslim population in the country is expected to increase to nearly 16% by 2030.<sup>8, 9, 10</sup>

### *Hinduism*

The sources of what today is called "Hinduism" can be traced to approximately 1500 B.C.E.<sup>11</sup> The earliest Vedic text, the *Rigveda*, was written during this time, and its hymns describe the religious practices, culture, and philosophy of the early Vedic civilization (thought to have been centered in modern Punjab). The central beliefs and practices of modern Hinduism can be traced to this and the other early Vedic texts.<sup>12</sup>

Today, Hinduism is the dominant religion of India and Nepal. Hindus believe in the reincarnation (*samsara*) of the soul (*atman*), and that the quality of a person's next life is determined by their actions

in previous ones (*karma*). The caste system, in which one is born into a particular social level, is tied to this concept. To improve their position, Hindus must remain spiritually devout and follow the social and moral guidelines according to their station in life (*dharma*).<sup>13, 14</sup> One can overcome the cycle of rebirth only through the eradication of desire and ignorance. This liberation is achieved through monastic or devotional paths and is referred to as *moksha*. In some conceptions, *moksha* is a union or reunion with Brahman, the eternal and infinite force from which everything derives.<sup>15, 16</sup>

### *Islam*

Islam spread throughout South Asia beginning in the early eighth century and became the largest minority religion in India.<sup>17, 18, 19</sup> Islam has two main branches, Sunni and Shi'ite, which fractured over the succession of authority after Muhammad's death.<sup>20</sup> The majority of Muslims in India are Sunnis.<sup>21</sup> At various times over the last millennium, much of the Indian subcontinent has been part of Muslim sultanates and kingdoms.<sup>22</sup> Some of India's most famous architectural wonders, such as the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Delhi, arose in these periods.<sup>23, 24</sup>



*Hindu Monks in Veraval, Gujarat  
Flickr / Amit Rawat*

At the time of independence and partition, many Indian Muslims migrated to the western and eastern portions of the new country of Pakistan (now Pakistan and Bangladesh). Some did so by choice, but others were forced.<sup>25</sup> Today, the highest percentages of Muslims in India are in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal, Bihar, Marashtra, Assam, and Kerala.<sup>26</sup> However, they also make up 25% or more of the population in several large northern and central cities.<sup>27</sup>



*Pigeons in front of a mosque*  
*Flickr / Chris Goldberg*

### *Sikhism*

Sikhism was founded in the early 16th century by a Punjabi, Guru Nanak. He was followed by a line of nine gurus, whose teachings were compiled in a book (*Guru Granth Sahib*)



*Sikhs*  
*Flickr / nevil zaveri*

that is today considered the descendant of the gurus and the living word of God.<sup>28, 29</sup> Within India today, Sikhism has nearly 23 million adherents, who represent 1.9% of India's population.<sup>30</sup> In 2004 Manmohan Singh became the first Sikh to become India's prime minister.<sup>31</sup> Though Sikhs make up such a small portion of the population, they frequently make up a significant percentage of the Indian armed forces, and once composed as much as one-third of the Indian army.<sup>32, 33</sup>

Over 96% of Indian Sikhs live in either Punjab, the only state in India where Sikhism is a majority religion (approximately 64%), or the northern states and territories nearest Punjab (Rajasthan, Haryana, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir).<sup>34</sup>

### *Other*

There are several other religions practiced by Indians. About 2.5% of the population are Christian, about 0.7% are Buddhist, and 0.5% follows Jainism. There are small numbers of Zoroastrians and Jews in the country.<sup>35, 36, 37</sup>

## Role of Religion in Government

The framers of the Indian constitution understood the dangers of the underlying cultural rifts in Indian society, and so established a set of fundamental rights within the Indian Constitution.<sup>38</sup> Freedom of religion is a key element of these rights and is defined by Articles 25–28 of the Constitution.<sup>39</sup> In 1976 the words “secular” and “socialist” were inserted into the Constitution’s preamble to describe India’s form of government.<sup>40, 41</sup>

“Secularism” within India is not so much about separation between religion and state but rather ensures the government respects and protects the beliefs and theological underpinnings of all religions.<sup>42, 43</sup> Many Indian laws were enacted to assure that no religious group or subgroup is allowed to have unfair political, economic, or legal advantages over other religious groups. Thus, while India is a secular state, it does recognize the legal traditions and practices for family and personal law within its various religious communities.<sup>44</sup> For example, Muslim personal and family law is administered through the regular courts according to *Hanafi fiqh* (a school of religious law within Sunni Islam).<sup>45</sup>



*Bride and groom  
Flickr / Michał Huniewicz*

Nonetheless, the continuance of such governmental accommodation to religious legal practices is controversial. The Indian Constitution, and subsequent legislation, have also been used as instruments of religious reform, particularly for Hinduism. For example, the Constitution bans the practice of “untouchability.” For another, the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 (applying also to Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains) legally reformed the Hindu practices of child marriage and polygamy and laid out a legal basis for divorce.<sup>46, 47, 48</sup>

## Influence of Religion on Daily Life



India is a hierarchical society in which all forms of social interaction are influenced by underlying social stratification and rankings. The caste system is the best-known example of this phenomenon. Although the caste system is associated with Hinduism, variations of caste relations can be seen within minority Indian religious communities such as Islam and Christianity.<sup>49, 50</sup> Even though the caste system has been banned by legislation, it still permeates much of Indian life, particularly in rural areas.<sup>51, 52</sup>

Prayer and performing religious rituals are important parts of the daily life of most religious Indians. Hindu daily worship (*puja*) is often done in the morning after bathing but prior to eating or drinking anything.<sup>53, 54, 55, 56</sup>

*Daily prayer  
Flickr / Scott D. Haddow*

It is usually performed in home shrines. Muslims have five obligatory daily prayers as well as a congregational prayer on Fridays.<sup>57</sup> Sikhs recite prayers three times a day: in the morning (*Japji Sahib*), the evening (*Rehiras Sahib*), and before bed (*Kirtan Sohila*).<sup>58, 59, 60</sup>

## Influence of Religion on the Interactions Between Males and Females

The two largest religions in India (Hinduism and Islam) have been criticized for practices that are viewed by many as being unfair to women. Examples include the ban on remarriage in higher Hindu castes, child marriages, polygamy, inheritance laws, the Muslim practice of “*triple talaq*” (instant divorce), dowry practices, and many more.<sup>61, 62, 63, 64</sup> Over the years, India has slowly legislated against some of these, although enacting such reform is difficult because it often conflicts with the principle of allowing personal and family law for religious groups.<sup>65</sup> These issues are smoldering, and women in both religions are pressing for change.<sup>66, 67</sup>

## Religious Events and Holidays

A large number of Hindu festivals focus on the worship of deities. Throughout India, the images or icons of deities are removed from their shrines at least once each year to parade in processions that sometimes last for several days. The images are carried by adherents on palanquins (pole-supported sedan chairs) or in large-wheeled carts, and

may be lavishly decorated to appear lifelike. They may also be adorned with expensive clothes and flower garlands around their necks.<sup>68</sup>

A number of Hindu religious festivals are officially recognized by the government as “closed holidays,” during which work stops throughout the country.<sup>69</sup> The largest of these festivals occurs near the end of the southwest monsoon season.<sup>70, 71</sup>

The large number of religious holidays in India means that any summary will be incomplete and somewhat arbitrary. And many Hindu festivals have significant regional variations. The following list is simply a small sample of some significant Hindu and Sikh religious festivals.

*Ganesh Visarjan Day, Mumbai*  
*Flickr / Sandeep Achetan*



### *Diwali (Festival of Lights)*

Diwali, the festival of lights, is a 5-day festival celebrated nationwide in India in either October or November, based on the Hindu calendar.

Although Hindus have various reasons for celebrating, Diwali is commonly accepted as a celebration of the renewal of life. In preparation for the festival, homes and businesses

are decorated with traditional motifs and colorful designs. Participants purchase jewelry and new clothes, and sweets are exchanged among family and friends. Each night during the festival, thousands of Dwali *diyas* (small clay or earthen oil lamps) are lit.<sup>72</sup>



*Candle for Diwali  
Flickr / Shital Khandarr*

### *Navaratri/Dussehra (also called Vijaydashmi)*

This nationwide festival, beginning on the first day of the Hindu month of Ashwin (September–October), celebrates the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati, and



*Festival for Dussehra  
Flickr / Nitin Badhwar*

commemorates the death of the evil Ravana at the hands of the exiled prince Rama. Ramlila, a dance-drama relating the life of Rama, is enacted for the first 9 days of Navaratri. On Dussehra, the 10th day of the celebration, a large effigy of Ravana is presented and burned to celebrate his defeat.<sup>73, 74, 75</sup>

### *Holika/Holi (Festival of Colors)*

The spring festival of Holi is celebrated each year in March or April, based on the Hindu calendar. It actually starts the night before with a bonfire made of dried leaves and branches, commemorating the burning of the demon Holika.

*Holi Festival  
Flickr / Henry Kcheung*





### Exchange 1: Will you celebrate Holi tomorrow?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will you celebrate Holi tomorrow?	kaya aap kal holi manaenge?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

The festival is also associated with Krishna and his love for Radha. In one legend, Krishna was envious of Radha's pale complexion, and playfully applied color to her face. Today, participants visit homes of friends and family, exchange sweets and garlands of fruit, and throw or apply a colored powder called *gulal* or *abeer* on one another. Holi is also a feast, and many foods are prepared exclusively for this festival.<sup>76, 77</sup>

### *Vaisakhi (also called Baisakhi)*

Vaisakhi is a Punjabi harvest festival that for Sikhs has become a combined religious and New Year's festival. It occurs in most years on April 13th. For Sikhs, Baishakhi



commemorates the birth of the Khalsa, which are Sikhs who have undergone the sacred *Amrit* (baptism) ceremony.<sup>78</sup> During this time, Sikhs come together to worship at *gurdwaras* and listen to readings of the scriptures before the feasting and processions begin.<sup>79, 80</sup>

*Vaisakhi Celebrations*  
Flickr /  
Gurumustuk Singh

## Buildings of Worship

### *Mandir or Kovil*

The Hindu temple is known as a *mandir* or *kovil*. Within are images of the primary and subordinate Hindu deities to which the temple is dedicated. Also within are the

priests, ritual specialists, and attendants who serve the temple. The temple is frequently used for communal worship and ritual performance, whereas daily prayers are typically done at small shrines at home. The temples vary tremendously in size and shape, but contain some kind of shrine. The shrine is the sacred center of the *mandir* and houses the temple gods. Near the shrine is the room where the priests ready themselves for worship. For many Hindus who live in more rural areas, worship can take place outside and often there is no *murti* or sacred image.<sup>81</sup>



*Birla Mandir, Jaipur*  
Flickr / clicknick

## Mosque

Indian Muslims worship in mosques. Much of India was ruled for many centuries by Muslims, and some of the country's most famous architectural achievements are mosques built during the periods of sultanate, Mughal, and later regional rule. The Taj-ul-Masjid in Bhopal, the Moti Masjid and Jama Masjid in Delhi, and the Taj Mahal in Agra are a few examples.<sup>82</sup>



Mosque in Lucknow  
Flickr / tdayal

## Gurdwara

The Sikh temple or shrine is called a *gurdwara*. Prominent within it is the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh holy book that is also considered by Sikhs to be the living Guru. Prominently displayed outside the *gurdwara* is the Sikh flag, the *Nishan Sahib*. It is triangular, of burnt orange or saffron color, and displays the Khanda, the symbol of Sikhism.<sup>83</sup>



Golden Temple  
Flickr / jasleen\_kaur

## Behavior in Places of Worship

### Visiting a Mandir/Kovil



Shoes should always be removed before entering a *mandir*. Dress should be conservative. In some temples, particularly in southern India, men may be required to remove their shirt and wear a *lungi* (a long cotton cloth worn like a kilt). Some temples do not permit non-Hindus; therefore, one should always check before entering.<sup>84</sup>

Shoemaker  
Flickr / stordito

**Exchange 2: May I enter?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I enter?	main yahan aa sakta (M) / sakti (F) hoon?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

Alcohol, tobacco products, intoxicants, and non-vegetarian food items should not be brought into the temple. Some temples do not allow women who are menstruating to enter.<sup>85</sup>

*Visiting a Mosque*

Indian tradition does not permit non-Muslims to enter a mosque, so it best to request permission to enter. Expect to see a separation of genders in the mosque. Shoes should be removed prior to entering the building and women should always cover their heads with scarves.<sup>86</sup>

**Exchange 3: May I have a head cover?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I have a head cover?	sir dakney ke liye kuch dey?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

Never walk in front of a Muslim who is praying in a mosque because this invalidates the prayer.<sup>87, 88</sup>

*Visiting a Gurdwara*

When visiting a *gurdwara*, follow many of the same rules as when visiting a *mandir* or *mosque*: do not wear shoes, dress conservatively, and do not bring alcohol or tobacco products. Men and women are expected to cover their heads in a *gurdwara* as a gesture of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib. Unlike Hindu *mandirs*, *gurdwaras* are built for congregational worship. Devotees sit cross-legged on the floor facing the Guru Granth Sahib. Men and women are usually, but not always, on opposite sides of the devotional hall.<sup>89, 90, 91</sup>

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# Overview

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## Chapter 2 Assessment

1. The vast majority of Indians are Hindus.

**TRUE**

Nearly 926 million Indians, or 80.5%, are Hindus. The largest minority religion, Islam, is practiced by only 13.4% of the population.

2. India is a secular state.

**TRUE**

India was established as a secular state. The constitution of India guarantees freedom of religion.

3. The caste system is legal in India today.

**FALSE**

The caste system has been outlawed, but elements of the caste system are at work in the country, especially in rural areas. It still permeates much of Indian society.

4. The Hindu temple of worship is called the *gurdwara*.

**FALSE**

The Sikh temple is called a *gurdwara*. The Hindu temple is called a *mandir* or a *kovil*.

5. Most Sikhs live in Punjab.

**TRUE**

Over 96% of Indian Sikhs live in Punjab. It is the only state in which Sikhism is the majority religion.



*School children smiling  
Flickr / F. Fiondella (IRI/CCAFS)*

## CHAPTER 3

# Traditions

## Honors and Values

India is a land of diverse cultures, yet some traditional values transcend all groups and are part of the Indian character. Indians have great respect for elders, and younger people frequently seek the blessing of elder family members. Respect is highly valued and respecting another is considered a duty.

Tolerance of other ways of life and other cultures is also important in Indian life. Indians are well known for their hospitality and guests are treated as family members.



Helpfulness is another feature of society. A core Indian value is to distribute joy and to share sadness. This is considered a means to developing cooperation among people.

Some families in India are matriarchal, but most are patriarchal. Whichever tradition a family follows, the family is a central feature of life. Respecting and holding on to family traditions regarding cooking, rituals, or beliefs are highly important.

The values of India embody the idea of living life to the fullest. Adjusting to change and embracing differences with tolerance are essential. Being flexible while affirming belief in their traditions and history is the attitude of modern India's people.<sup>1</sup>

## Greetings, Introductions, and Shaking Hands



The people of India practice a vast array of customs and traditions. Every conceivable activity carries its own ceremony. Customs vary considerably, depending on location and how traditional or contemporary are the people. India maintains a hierarchal culture, so always greet the eldest person first or most senior person first.<sup>2,3</sup>

Friendly smile  
Flickr /  
Micha\_Huniewicz

### Exchange 4: Good morning.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good morning.	namaste
<b>Local:</b>	Good morning.	namaste

The common way of greeting is to say *namaste* or *namaskar* to men, women, or children.<sup>4</sup> The gesture of *namaste* is made by putting the palms of your hands together in front of your heart and then lightly bowing your head.<sup>5,6</sup>

### Exchange 5: Good afternoon.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good afternoon.	namaste
<b>Local:</b>	Good afternoon.	namaste

When speaking in English, it is acceptable to say greetings such as “good day,” “good afternoon,” and “good evening.”

### Exchange 6: Good evening.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good evening.	shaam ko
<b>Local:</b>	Good evening.	namaste

Yet in Hindi, *namaste* or *namaskar* are used interchangeably throughout the day.

**Exchange 7: Good night.**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good night.	shubh ratri
<b>Local:</b>	Good night.	shubh ratri

When speaking English, “How do you do?” is also an acceptable greeting.

**Exchange 8: During the Day**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good afternoon.	namaste
<b>Local:</b>	Good afternoon.	namaste
<b>Soldier:</b>	How are you?	aap kaise hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Fine, thank you.	mainteeKh hoon, dhanyavad

Shaking hands is quite common in India. Men may shake hands with men, and women may shake hands with women. However, religious beliefs may preclude a man from shaking a woman’s hand. If you are not sure whether shaking hands is appropriate when meeting for the first time, it is best to wait for the other person to initiate the handshake. Avoid using the left hand, which is considered unclean. Hugging is common among relatives.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup>

The formal pronoun *aap* (you) is a polite and safe way to address a person of either gender.<sup>10</sup>

Informal speech has complicated attributes, and it differs from gender to gender.

**Exchange 9: Hi, Mr. Sharma. (Informal)**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Hi, Mr. Sharma.	namaste, Mr. Sharma
<b>Local:</b>	Hello.	namaste
<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you doing well?	kaya aap teeKh hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haa

**Male-Female Interactions**

The Hindu religion, unlike many other religions, has numerous female deities. Nonetheless, the vast majority of India reflects a patriarchal society, in which the traditional roles for women center on being a wife and mother. It has been noted that as India’s economy becomes more dependent on services and manufacturing and less on agriculture, more women have become part of the non-domestic workforce. Yet these changes have not been uniform across all groups within the country. For example, the



Market vendors  
Flickr / New Delhices

disparity between rates of male and female employment is highest among Muslims and upper-caste Hindu families. These two groups are also most associated with the practice of *purdah*, or the veiling of women to those outside the family.<sup>11, 12</sup> On the other hand, Dalits, who are historically of a low economic class, have one of the highest female labor participation rates, and most of this employment is in low-income positions.<sup>13, 14</sup>

Despite these gender issues, India has been quite progressive in terms of electing women to high office. Many women serve in the national legislature and state and local governments. Quota systems reserve a minimum number of seats for women at each level of government.<sup>15, 16, 17</sup>

## Hospitality and Gift-Giving



Indians are known for their generous hospitality. When visiting an Indian home, bring flowers, sweets, or a small gift. If the host has small children, a toy is an appropriate gift. Do not give white flowers because white is the color associated with funerals. Lucky colors are yellow, green, and red.<sup>18</sup>

Flower Bouquet  
Flickr / Swaminathan

**Exchange 10:** I appreciate your hospitality.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I appreciate your hospitality.	satkar ka dhanyavad
<b>Local:</b>	You're welcome.	yeh to mera saubhagya hey

Avoid leather or pigskin gifts because of potential conflict with religious and dietary practices.<sup>19</sup> Jewelry for the host's wife would be considered inappropriate, especially if given by a man. Before entering an Indian home, leave your shoes outside the door to the house.<sup>20</sup> Elders are treated with great respect, so always greet them.<sup>21</sup>

**Exchange 11:** Did you make this meal yourself?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did you make this meal yourself?	keya yeh khana aapne khud banaya?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haa

It is always proper etiquette to show one's appreciation for the food.<sup>22</sup>

**Exchange 12:** The meal was very good.

<b>Soldier:</b>	The meal was very good.	khaana bahut swad tha
<b>Local:</b>	Thanks.	dhanyavad

When hosting a social event, call each guest shortly before the event, even if invitations have been mailed, because Indians often do not RSVP.<sup>23</sup>

**Exchange 13:** What is your phone number?

<b>Soldier:</b>	What is your phone number?	aapka phone number kya hai?
<b>Local:</b>	My phone number is 132 5477.	1325477

Expect guests to arrive 15 or 30 minutes late, because this is considered good manners. It is not unusual for Indians to bring others as guests.<sup>24, 25</sup>

**Exchange 14:** Are these people part of your family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are these people part of your family?	kya yeh log aapke parivar se hain?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahin

Indians love conversation, discussions, and speechmaking. Conversational topics include anything from politics to their families, India, or cricket. Sometimes, questions may turn personal, but this is considered taking a normal friendly interest in another person. Making enquiries about someone's personal life or family is considered polite conversation.<sup>26</sup>

**Exchange 15:** Are you married?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you married?	keya aap vivahhit hey?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nahi

## Eating Habits



Religious and dietary practices are important to remember when dining with Indians. Eating meat altogether is taboo for many Indians, and other groups will not eat certain types of meat. For example, Muslims do not eat pork, and non-vegetarian Hindus do not eat beef. Jains have a particularly rigid diet, avoiding meat, honey, and even most vegetables.<sup>27, 28, 29</sup>

*Common lunch  
Flickr / Malcolm Williams*

Cleanliness is important to almost all Indians, and hands should be washed before and after all meals. Avoid passing or touching foods with the left hand, because it is considered unclean by many Indians. Indian meals are often eaten using the hands, but only the right hand should be used.<sup>30, 31</sup>

## Types of Food

Most places in the world have been exposed to the delights of Indian cuisine. Indian food is actually a collection of cuisines, with significant differences between the foods



of the Indian regions. Because of the long rule of Central Asian Muslim empires, the cuisine of North India, where most Hindi speakers dwell, is greatly influenced by the dishes of Central Asia. Mughlai cuisine, as it is called, is passed down from the kitchens of the old Mughal emperors and is today associated with much of the North. The food is spicy and rich, and dishes often include dried fruits, dairy, and nuts. *Biryani*, a rice dish that is slowly cooked with chicken or other meat in a clay pot, is a classic dish from this tradition.<sup>32, 33</sup>

*Meal in a restaurant, Tamil Nadu  
Flickr / Magda Wojtyra*

## Dress Codes

Standards for dress vary by region and religion. Superstitions and traditions also govern color selections for social events. For example, black and white are the colors most often seen at Christian weddings, yet are absent from Hindu weddings because these colors



are associated with mourning.<sup>34</sup> In general, women tend to wear more traditional garments, whereas men tend to dress in Western influenced clothing.<sup>35</sup> In either case, clothing is brightly colored, conservatively cut, and not revealing.<sup>36</sup>

India is known for its multitude of clothing styles that reflect its blend of cultures and religions. Countless variations exist from region to region.<sup>37</sup> The most familiar fashion style for women is a wrap dress known as a *sari*, made from a rectangular piece of cloth measuring 5.5 to 8.2 m (6 to 9 yards) in length. It is usually first wrapped around the waist and then the shoulder, although

*Friends in common dress  
Flickr / ragesh ev*

numerous wrapping styles exist. The sari is worn over a tight-fitting *choli* (blouse) that is often short, leaving the midriff bare.<sup>38</sup> In western states, such as Gujarat and Rajasthan, the choli is worn with a colorful skirt known as a *lehanga* or *ghagra*. This style is completed by draping an *odhni* or *dupatta* (veil cloth) over the head or neck.<sup>39, 40</sup>

Men have increasingly moved to Western style clothing in urban areas, but traditional styles are still frequently seen in Indian villages and at formal social events. *Lungis* and *dhotis* are cloths that are wrapped around the waist (and through the legs in the case of dhotis). In many parts of India, these are worn under *kurtas* (knee-length tunics).<sup>41, 42</sup> Turbans (also known as *safas*) are worn frequently in northwestern states such as Punjab and Rajasthan.<sup>43, 44</sup>

In an urban business setting, men usually wear a suit and tie, except in the summer months, when the jacket may be removed. Businesswomen usually wear conservative dresses or pantsuits.<sup>45</sup>

## Non-Religious Celebrations

### *National Holidays*

India is officially a secular country, but the central government recognizes the major holidays of all faiths. These may be recognized as public holidays in some states but not in all. India does have three major secular holidays that are celebrated nationwide.



*Boys holding flag of India  
Flickr / Prabhu B Doss*

August 15th is *Independence Day*, commemorating the date when India achieved freedom from British rule in 1947. Flag-hoisting ceremonies, kite flying, and the passing out of sweets are some of the activities. In Delhi, at the historic Red Fort, the prime minister gives a major speech, similar to the Presidential State of the Union address in the United States.<sup>46</sup>

January 26th (*Republic Day*) is the date on which India's Constitution was ratified and India became a republic. Parades are held throughout the country, with the largest in the nation's capital, New Delhi. The parade salutes all branches of the Indian military and includes cultural displays and folk dancing from different regions of India.<sup>47</sup>

October 2nd is *Gandhi Jayanti*, which is the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. He is considered by most to be the "Father of the Indian Nation." Prayer services and special tributes are held throughout India.<sup>48</sup>

## Dos and Don'ts

**Do** always use professional titles when addressing people.

**Do** wear shoes that are easy to get in and out of and bring a scarf if you plan to visit temples or mosques.

**Do** ask for permission before entering a temple or mosque. Men and women should be dressed modestly.

**Do** say “no thank you” politely. Hands are held in the starting position of the *namaste* (palms together, fingers up) and then twisted so the palms are opened outwards.

**Do** demonstrate patience instead of being confrontational; asking open-ended questions that may be answered positively will aid communications.

**Do** bring a small gift, sweets, or a toy when visiting an Indian household.

**Do not** use the left hand to pass items, touch people, or touch items unless necessary. The left hand is considered unclean and should not be used.

**Do not** touch a person on the head, including a child. The head is seen as the temple of the soul.

**Do not** let feet or shoes touch another person. If it does happen accidentally, an apology should be offered immediately. Feet should not be placed on desks or other items of furniture. Do not expose the soles of your feet.

**Do not** say “no” directly when having a conversation. Instead, disagreement may be hinted at, responses delayed, or inquiries ignored. If an Indian does not know the answer to a question, they will not likely say “I don't know.” Vague, evasive responses such as “I'll try” are acceptable.<sup>49</sup>

**Do not** use offensive language even if a person does not openly speak English, because they may understand you.

**Do not** bring leather or pigskin items or jewelry as gifts when visiting Indian homes.

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# Overview

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## Chapter 3 Assessment

1. India has been quite progressive in terms of electing women to high office.

**TRUE**

Many women serve in the national legislature and state and local governments. Quota systems reserve a minimum number of seats for women at each level of government.

2. Dalits have high female labor participation rates.

**TRUE**

Dalits are historically of a low socio-economic class. They have high female labor participation rates, although most of this employment is in low-income positions.

3. Handshakes are an acceptable form of greeting in India.

**TRUE**

Handshakes are acceptable as a form of greeting. Men may shake hands with men, women with women, but religious beliefs may preclude a man from shaking a woman's hand.

4. A leather handbag or briefcase would be an appropriate gift.

**FALSE**

Because many Hindus are vegetarian and revere cows, they would not appreciate a gift made of leather.

5. Conservative, modest clothing is rare among Indian women.

**FALSE**

Dress for men and women, in India, is usually conservatively cut and modest. In general, men wear clothing with a Western influence while women wear more traditional garments.



## CHAPTER 4

*Housing in Delhi  
Flickr / Eric Parker*

# Urban Life

## Introduction

The increase of urbanization has greatly affected Indian society. About 32% of the country's population is urban, and the rate is rising. Mumbai has 21.2 million people, and New Delhi has a population of 25 million. These two cities are currently the sixth- and second-largest urban areas in the world, respectively.<sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</sup>

India's cities have been expanding quickly, in part because of migration.<sup>6, 7</sup> People move to the cities trying to find jobs and improve their economic opportunities. However, a lack of infrastructure and development planning has led to approximately one-eighth

of India's urban population living in slum areas, an improvement since 2011.<sup>8, 9, 10</sup> The growth of India's cities will continue at an even greater pace in the coming decades. It is projected that in the next 20 years, the five largest states in India will have more people living in urban areas than in rural ones.<sup>11</sup> The country might be able to avoid additional problems in its urban areas if it finds a way to provide better infrastructure, public transportation, safe water supplies, and better waste management.<sup>12, 13</sup>

## Urbanization Issues



India's largest cities are densely populated, congested, noisy, polluted, and lacking in clean water, electricity, sanitation, and decent housing. It is not unusual to see poor housing directly next to luxury apartment buildings, as well as streets filled with pedestrians, cattle, and vehicles.<sup>14, 15</sup>

*Smog in Delhi  
Flickr / Ville Miettinen*

**Exchange 16:** Is there lodging nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there lodging nearby?	kya yahan paas mein koyee rahne ki jagah milegi?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haa

Yet these cities are centers of commerce, education, science, politics, and government. India's Hindi movie industry, known as Bollywood, is the world's largest. In addition, popular television stations are growing. The movies bring portrayals of urban lifestyles to small-town dwellers and villagers all over the country.<sup>16</sup>

## Work Problems in Urban Areas



*Tailor in Anantnag  
Flickr /  
Sandeep Achetan*

India has become one of the world's fastest growing markets in information technology, business process outsourcing, telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals. While the services sector booms with promising job opportunities, 90% of India's labor force remains in low-productivity jobs.<sup>17, 18</sup> Poverty rates have been fluctuating in recent years. High rural-to-urban migration led to overcrowding

in urban industries and this raised the urban unemployment rate. However, emerging industries reversed the trend. In recent years, the urban unemployment rate has fallen from 20.9% to 13.7%. Some analysts speculate that one reason for such a sharp decrease in urban unemployment is reverse migration. People who have been unable to find work in the cities have returned to their rural homes.<sup>19, 20, 21</sup>

The informal employment sector provides about two-thirds of the employment in the urban areas. Informal sector workers are mainly street vendors, domestic servants, cleaners, repairmen, and people who do odd jobs. Wages in this sector are low and insecure. Generally, such workers are at the lowest end of the pay scale, often making barely enough to survive.<sup>22</sup>

## Health Issues

Though adequate to excellent medical care is available in India's major cities, for most Indians access to care is problematic. A lack of government funding, severe shortages



of health centers, and a shortage of healthcare workers conspire to have a negative affect on India's healthcare system.<sup>23</sup>

While private health insurance has become increasingly prevalent among the middle and upper classes, many Indians cannot afford such policies and rely solely upon the public health system.<sup>24</sup> The Government Insurance Company (GIC) provides the bulk of the insurance.<sup>25</sup>

*An infant receives a medical checkup  
Flickr / Ray Witlin / World Bank*

**Exchange 17:** Is there a medical clinic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	kaya paas mein hospital hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, over there.	ji haan, vahan hai

Specialist care for those with money has vastly improved in the last few years.<sup>26</sup> Only about 25% of ordinary Indians have access to Western medicine, and those are concentrated in the urban areas where two-thirds of healthcare centers are located.<sup>27</sup>

Approximately two-thirds of Indian hospitals are public. Most provide only basic care. The facilities are frequently understaffed and have poorly maintained medical equipment, and 80% have no telephone connections.<sup>28</sup> The quality of services available is below standard in many hospitals.<sup>29</sup>

**Exchange 18:** Do you have any more bottled water?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have any more bottled water?	aur bottle ka pani milega?
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	ji achcha

## Education and Schools in Cities

Shortly after India achieved independence, a government priority was to make education available to all citizens. The Indian constitution makes elementary education a fundamental right for all children ages 6 to 14. Despite these moves, the overall literacy



*School children  
Flickr / Keith Stamm*

rate of the country remains at about 62.8% and dropout rates are high.<sup>30, 31, 32</sup> By the age of 10, more than one-third of students have dropped out of school. Fewer than half of students enrolled in elementary school go on to secondary school.<sup>33</sup>

The quality and access to education in urban areas is generally better than in rural areas. Computer education is a priority and many classes are available using video conferencing technology. Unlike most rural schools, urban students have access to extracurricular activities, including sports and academic competitions.<sup>34</sup>

India's educational system is divided into pre-primary, primary (elementary), middle (intermediate), secondary (high school), and higher education, similar to the United States. Primary school children (ages 6–11)

are typically in the first to fifth grades. Middle school students (ages 11–14) are in the sixth to eighth grades. Secondary school students (ages 14–17) are in the 9th to 12th grades.<sup>35</sup>

**Exchange 19:** Is there a school nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a school nearby?	kya paas mein koi school hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haa

Higher education includes technical schools, colleges, and universities. There are three kinds of colleges in India. First are government colleges in those states where private industry is not strong, or in states previously controlled by royalty. Second are colleges managed by religious organizations and private enterprise. Third are professional colleges that focus on curricula in medicine, teacher training, engineering, law, and agriculture.<sup>36</sup> India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world.<sup>37</sup>

## Restaurants

Authentic Indian food is considered one of the best cuisines of the world, on par with French and Chinese cuisine. Indian food ranges from simple vegetarian dishes to full-flavored meat, chicken, and fish dishes.<sup>38</sup>

*Restaurant in Shimla*  
*Flickr / Lihi Koren*



**Exchange 20:** I'd like some soup.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I'd like some soup.	mujhe soup deejaye
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	ji achcha

Restaurants can range from gourmet restaurants to small cafes and roadside stalls.

**Exchange 21:** I'd like coffee/tea.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I'd like coffee/tea.	mujeh coffee/chai chahiye
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	ji achcha

Most urban restaurants are air-conditioned and offer services on par with international standards. There are international chains in India as well.<sup>39</sup> Family-oriented restaurants may offer special rooms in which families can dine together.<sup>40</sup>

**Exchange 22:** Are you still serving breakfast/lunch/dinner?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you still serving breakfast/lunch/dinner?	kaya aap abhi bhi nashta/khana/raat ka khana de rahe hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haa

It is customary for Indians to eat with their fingers, but most restaurants provide silverware. Restaurants also provide finger bowls filled with warm lemon water, specifically for washing your hands before and after a meal.<sup>41</sup>

**Exchange 23:** Do you have any dessert?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have any dessert?	kuch meetha hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, we have <i>gulab jamun</i> and <i>barfi</i> .	ji haan, gulabjamun aur barfi hai

Restaurant prices are fixed. Check your bill before paying.<sup>42</sup>

**Exchange 24:** Put this all on one bill, OK?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Put this all on one bill, OK?	Yeh sab ek hi bill mein lagana, achcha?
<b>Local:</b>	OK.	ji achcha

A service charge is typically included and waiters do expect to be tipped; 10% of the bill is what is acceptable.<sup>43</sup>

**Exchange 25:** Can you get me my bill?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you get me my bill?	mera bill le kar aaye?
<b>Local:</b>	Sure.	ji achcha

Credit cards are usually accepted at the upscale restaurants and bars.<sup>44</sup> Always keep cash on hand for smaller restaurants and roadside stands.

**Exchange 26:** Do you accept credit cards?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you accept credit cards?	keya aap ke yahaa credit card chaltaa hey?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahi

The Indian rupee is the acceptable form of cash.<sup>45</sup>

## Market Place and Street Vendors

Supermarkets are becoming more common in India's cities. Though India has some regional grocery chains, there are no national chains. These supermarkets carry canned, packaged, and sometimes frozen foods. They also sell dry goods and convenience items.<sup>46, 47</sup>

**Exchange 27:** Can you give me change for this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you give me change for this?	keya aap mujhe is ka chutta degei?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahi

A few stores in the larger cities carry a limited range of imported food.

**Exchange 28:** Do you have any more of these?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have any more of these?	kya yeh aur bhi hain?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahi

Local produce markets tend to be crowded. Indians still prefer to buy fresh produce and



Flower market  
Flickr / McKay Savage



to buy only enough for the day's meals. Therefore, you are likely to find small vegetable and fruit stands in the suburbs.<sup>48, 49</sup>

**Exchange 29:** Is this food fresh?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this food fresh?	kya yeh khana taaza hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

As a rule, one must bargain to get good deals.<sup>50, 51</sup>

**Exchange 30:** I can give you this much money for this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	I can give you this much money for this?	mey to iske itney hi paise de sakta hu?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahi

Some street vendors can be quite vocal in demanding one to buy their wares.<sup>52</sup>

**Exchange 31:** Buy something from me.

<b>Local:</b>	Buy something from me.	mujh se khuch khareediye
<b>Soldier:</b>	No.	nahi

## Urban Traffic



*Traffic in New Delhi  
Flickr /  
Sandeep Singh Thukral*

Urban traffic in India can be dangerous. Vehicles veer between lanes. Traffic signals are not always functioning. Indian drivers have been known to drive fast and recklessly, exceed speed limits, try to overtake others, cut in front of other vehicles without signaling, and honk their horns often. Some auto rickshaw drivers, who wedge their way around, have been known to signal with their feet instead of their hands.<sup>53, 54</sup>

**Exchange 32:** Which direction to the airport?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Which direction to the airport?	hawaee adda kis taraf hai?
<b>Local:</b>	That way.	us taraf

Traffic jams are common. Chronic congestion, inadequate signage, limited visibility, and traffic crossing the center are all major and common concerns.<sup>55</sup>

**Exchange 33:** Is there a gas station nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a gas station nearby?	yahaa paas mey koee petrol pump hey?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haa

The safest driving policy is to assume that other drivers will not respond to a traffic situation in the same way that you would in the United States. For instance, buses and trucks often run red lights and merge directly into traffic. Frequent honking of the horn or flashing of headlights is typical. Many Americans who visit India choose to hire a local driver.<sup>56</sup>

**Exchange 34:** Can I get a cab around here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can I get a cab around here?	yahan kahin taxi mil sakti hey?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

## Transportation

India has numerous options for traveling within and between cities. However, traveling by road is quite dangerous in India, which has the highest number of traffic-related deaths in the world. Traveling at night magnifies the danger.<sup>57</sup>

### Railroads



India has an extensive and affordable rail system. Nearly 14 million Indians ride on trains every day. Trains are the preferred mode of travel for long journeys, especially if overnight. If traveling to important destinations during festival times, be aware that trains can be extremely crowded and people have been trampled to death.<sup>58</sup>

*Train  
Flickr / Nitin Bhardwaj*

**Exchange 35:** Is there a train station nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a train station nearby?	kya paas mein koi railway station hai?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahin
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

## Buses

Buses are the cheapest way to get around the country, but are overcrowded. They must negotiate extremely congested, narrow streets with no separate right of way, and contend



with animal-drawn carts, minivans, cars, taxis, motorized two-wheelers, rickshaws, pedestrians, cyclists, and street vendors. Severe roadway congestion has forced most buses to slow to 6–10 km/h (3.7–6.2 mi/h) in many large cities.<sup>59, 60</sup> Government buses are the safest and more reliable, although private buses tend to be cheaper. Buses often have accidents. Avoid taking them at night, unless necessary, because the risk of accidents is much higher.<sup>61</sup>

*Buses in Malappuram  
Flickr / Dietmut  
Tejgeman-Hansen*

**Exchange 36:** Will the bus be here soon?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will the bus be here soon?	kya yahan jaldi hi bus aani vaali hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

## Rickshaws



A cycle rickshaw is a three-wheeled enclosed vehicle. Although popular in smaller towns and rural areas, most cities are trying to phase out the rickshaw.<sup>62</sup> They have a meter that is reset once you enter. Rickshaw drivers can also charge extra for travel to and from remote areas. Make sure that your cost is established before entering the rickshaw and do not pay until you are finished with the vehicle.<sup>63</sup>

*Rickshaws  
Flickr / Alfredo Miguel Romero*

## Other Options

*Tongas*, horse-drawn two-wheeled vehicles, and *victorias*, horse-drawn carriages, are available in some cities. Suburban trains are also an option in the cities of Delhi and Mumbai.<sup>64</sup>

## Street Crime and Solicitation

Street crime is common. Passengers on buses and trains are often the target of pickpockets. Theft of U.S. passports is quite common. Travelers are urged to lock their sleeping compartments and take valuables with them when leaving their berths.<sup>65</sup>

Women should avoid traveling alone, particularly in Delhi. Incidents of verbal and physical harassment, as well as rape, frequently occur. Women are also advised to avoid public transportation. It is best to avoid hailing a cab on the street. Have a hotel call for you or catch one at a hotel.<sup>66</sup>

**Exchange 37:** Did these people threaten you?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did these people threaten you?	kya ein logon ne aapko dhamki di hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

### *Terrorist Groups*

In recent years, there have been occasional terrorist bombing incidents throughout India. These have occurred in public places and on public transportation, such as trains and buses, resulting in deaths and injuries.<sup>67</sup> One such attack was the 26 November 2008 attack by Pakistani terrorists that killed 163 victims. Another was the 7 December 2010 attack on a Hindu temple in the city of Varanasi.<sup>68, 69</sup>

**Exchange 38:** Do you need my help?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you need my help?	kaya meri madad ki zaroorat hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

Terrorist threats remain high throughout the country, and many of the terrorist groups operating within India are anti-Western groups that target crowded public places.<sup>70, 71</sup>

**Exchange 39:** Do you know what is wrong?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know what is wrong?	kaya aapko pata hai ki kaya huaa hai?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahi



*Child beggar  
Flickr / Julien Lagarde*

### *Beggars*

Begging is common in urban areas and gangs are behind much of it. Tourist sites are commonly frequented by beggars. The best way to handle it is to ignore the requests. If you give money to one, you will likely be besieged by others, who can be quite persistent in their requests. If you feel you must give something, give only 10 to 20 rupees at a time. Never give money when arriving at a location—only when you are leaving. Often, women beggars rent babies to seem more pitiable.<sup>72</sup> Be aware that because of the criminal element inherent in begging in India, any gifts—whether money, toys, school supplies, or anything else that can be sold—simply contributes to the human trafficking that is endemic in India.<sup>73</sup>

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# Overview

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## Chapter 4 Assessment

1. The poverty rate in the cities is lower than poverty rates in the rural areas of the country.

**FALSE**

Although many migrate to the city in hopes of finding a better life, the poverty level in the cities is higher than in rural areas.

2. Buses are the safest way to travel in the country.

**FALSE**

Buses are cheap and convenient, but buses often have accidents because of congested roads, poor road conditions, and bad driving habits.

3. It is customary for Indians to eat with their fingers rather than utensils.

**TRUE**

Indians will most commonly eat with their fingers. But in restaurants, it is likely that utensils will be provided.

4. Most hospitals in India are privately owned and operated.

**FALSE**

Approximately two-thirds of the hospitals in the country are public. Most provide only basic care.

5. About half the population of India lives in urban areas.

**FALSE**

Approximately 30% of the country lives in cities, although the cities are growing at a fast clip.





## CHAPTER 5

*Pastoralist of the Deccan plateau  
Flickr / Praveena Sridhar*

# Rural Life

## Introduction

With nearly 650,000 villages spread across the country, about 68.7% (2011 census) of India's population live in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> More people work in the agricultural sector (49%) than in any other.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, other types of work and industry have come to rural India. About 20% of all households derive their income from small stores or other small businesses. In recent years, mean household income in rural India has increased.<sup>3,4</sup> Yet, in other respects, little has changed over the last few decades: phone and electrical services are intermittent and unreliable, and access to healthcare is limited.<sup>5,6</sup> Growth

in India's rural economy, however, has service providers scrambling to develop infrastructure in rural India.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to independence, India had a semi-feudal system in which land ownership was concentrated in the hands of a few. Tenant farmers who worked the land paid rent to the owners.<sup>8,9</sup> Such distribution practices left 40% of the rural population as landless agricultural workers by the time of Indian independence.<sup>10</sup> Following independence, India attempted a series of land reforms designed to increase agricultural productivity and lessen poverty in the countryside. Overall, these redistribution policies increased the degree of inequality, leaving more landless labor and concentrating ownership in fewer hands.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

## Land Distribution/Ownership

By the 1970s, the government had instituted reforms that stripped large landowners of their properties: forests, lakes, and lands. Subsequently, the government took over the role of landlord and became responsible for collecting rents, taxes, and money for activities such as grazing cattle and using river water to cultivate crops. Additionally, tenants were able to purchase the land they farmed if they had the money. By 1980, more than 6 million hectares (14,826,322 ac) of land had been distributed to formerly landless agricultural workers.<sup>14, 15</sup>



Although these land reforms have had some measure of success in terms of bettering the circumstances of rural farmers, India is still seeking ways to create a more equitable system of land reform and development—with an eye to reducing or eliminating poverty in the countryside.<sup>16</sup>

*Female farmer  
Flickr / Rajesh Pamnani*

**Exchange 40:** Do you own this land?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you own this land?	kya yeh zameen aapki hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

## Rural Economy

Of India's nearly 650,000 villages, most have fewer than 1,000 people, but some have as many as 5,000.<sup>17, 18, 19, 20</sup> Village residents engage in professions that range from priest and cultivator to merchant, artisan, and laborer.<sup>21</sup>

Shepherds move livestock between different pastures (called "transhumance") in the western Himalayas. In the

semiarid and arid regions, where agriculture is either impossible or unstable, shepherds of cattle, sheep, goats, and camels live with local farmers.<sup>22, 23</sup>

Many jobs in rural India depend on agriculture. However, in recent years rural jobs are also found outside the agricultural sector. These non-agricultural jobs have employed as much as 25% of the labor force in rural villages. Wages earned from non-farm jobs accounted for about 34% of household income.<sup>24</sup>

### Agricultural Jobs

Agriculture is still the most important sector of the rural economy. The most important products raised by Indian farmers are food grains such as rice and wheat, fruits and nuts, vegetables such as potatoes and pumpkins, seeds, spices, coffee and tea, tobacco products and cotton, rubber, and jute.<sup>25</sup> According to a government study, digging wells, plowing, and sowing were the highest-paid jobs for men in agriculture.



*Rural farmers*  
Flickr / Alex&Martina



*Man hauling his harvest*  
Flickr / rajkumar1220

**Exchange 41:** Do you have a job?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have a job?	kaya aapke paas naukari hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

The highest-paying jobs for women involved harvesting, followed by transplanting and threshing.<sup>26</sup>

**Exchange 42:** Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	kaya sare parivar mein khali aapke paas hi naukari hai?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahin

### *Non-Agricultural Jobs*

Non-agricultural jobs are those that do not directly perform farming activities. The sector has grown steadily in recent years and encompasses jobs such as mining, manufacturing, processing, construction, masonry, transport, and services, to name a few.<sup>27, 28, 29, 30</sup>



*Mechanic fixing rickshaw wheel  
Flickr / brando.n*

## Gender Roles

Rural India is a deeply tradition-bound patriarchal society. Customary women's roles involve housework, caring for children, and handling the domestic front.<sup>31</sup> Women are still second-class citizens. Preferences for male children, lower literacy rates for women, lower pay than men, and domestic violence are testimony that women are still subjugated in the country.<sup>32, 33, 34</sup> India's government is concerned about the roles of men and women in its rural states. Considerable outreach is offered in these areas.<sup>35, 36, 37</sup>



*Women walking to work  
Flickr / Sandeep Achetan*

Despite some changes in the economy and the roles of women, women are considered bearers of religious traditions. Thus, girls and women are often discouraged from pursuing an education or from working outside the home, and women are also pressured to marry quite young. Women cook, clean, carry water from wells to the household, and care for the children and other members of the family. Though there have been some changes in these roles, India continues to lag other nations with respect to modernizing the roles of women.<sup>38, 39, 40, 41</sup>

## Rural Transportation Issues

Traveling by road in India is dangerous. India has the dubious distinction of being first in the world in traffic-related fatalities. It may be best to remember that “might makes right,” which means that the bigger the vehicle, the more likely the driver will do what they want. Traffic signals are often ignored. Roads in rural areas are often poorly maintained, and have poor visibility and insufficient warning signs. It is not uncommon to meet vehicles traveling the wrong way on divided expressways. Drivers who hit pedestrians or cows have been attacked, so it is not advisable to stay too long at the scene of an accident. Instead, try to find the nearest police station to report the incident.<sup>42</sup>

**Exchange 43:** Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	yahan paas mein koyee achchaa mechanic hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

### Trains



Trains are a staple mode of transportation across India. In 2007, the rails carried 17 million passengers a day in addition to freight.<sup>43</sup> Trains and platforms are often crowded, and people have been crushed to death during platform stampedes to get on the train. Reports of passengers being drugged and theft on trains are cause for additional caution.<sup>44</sup>

*Train*  
*Flickr / generalising*

### Carts



Carts pulled by animals are increasingly being used. They primarily transport personal goods to markets. Many are improved carts that have smooth bearings with steel wheels and axles.<sup>45, 46</sup>

*Driving a Rickshaw cart*  
*Flickr / Fabio Campo*



Woman loading her bike  
Flickr / Ben Beiske

## Bicycles

Bicycles have been one of the most prominent modes of road transport in rural and urban India since the 1950s. The rural villager was the main consumer of bicycles.

**Exchange 44:** Do you know how to fix this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know how to fix this?	kaya aapko yeh teekh karna aata hai?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	nahi

By the mid-1990s, however, bicycles lost to motorized two-wheeled vehicles as the most widely used mode of personal transportation. Previously, the rural village could only afford a bicycle, but upgraded to the much faster and more convenient moped, scooter, or motorcycle. This resulted in a reduction in the demand for bicycles in rural areas.<sup>47, 48, 49</sup>

**Exchange 45:** Can you take me there?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you take me there?	aap mujhe vahan le ja sakte hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes, I can. Follow me.	ji haan, mere peeche aaiye

## Cars and Utility Vehicles

Utility vehicles are increasingly popular in the country because they can serve a number of purposes, such as hauling equipment. Sport utility vehicles are also in this class and, because of their capacity to carry larger numbers of people, have become more common.<sup>50, 51, 52, 53</sup>

## Buses

Buses are a popular way to get around, but they are extremely crowded. Buses connect nearly all cities and towns in the country. It is advisable to travel only during daylight. This is especially true for women and women traveling alone. Thieves and pickpockets are common dangers associated with bus travel.<sup>54</sup>

## Trucks

India's domestic auto manufacturers produce a range of trucks. Truck sales represent a multi-billion dollar industry.<sup>55</sup> These vehicles ply the rural back roads and city streets, delivering goods and services throughout the country.<sup>56</sup>

**Exchange 46:** Do you know this area very well?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know this area very well?	kya yeh jagah aapki dekhi bhali hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

## Health Issues

The majority of preventable rural deaths are related to infections, communicable diseases, parasites, or respiratory illnesses.

Waterborne infections account for 80% of all illness in the countryside. Other common diseases include diarrhea, typhoid fever, hepatitis, worm infestations, and polio; tuberculosis is also prevalent. Measles and pneumonia rates are high. Finally, malaria and leprosy are familiar to many villagers.<sup>57, 58, 59</sup>



*Female patient gets a check up  
Flickr / World Bank / Curt Carnemark*

India has an acute shortage of doctors and medical facilities in rural areas. There are almost no public hospitals outside of urban centers. Recent studies indicate that the formal government healthcare system reaches only about 50% of the population. For every 1,000 people there are only 0.6 doctors.<sup>60, 61</sup> Most rural Indians rely upon informal medical facilities, where medical staff do not have formal training. Access to quality drugs and medical technology is nearly non-existent.<sup>62</sup> Mobile medical units have improved the care in many parts of rural India. Charitable services provide transportation to and from medical facilities, offer free medical assistance, and provide education on sanitation, hygiene, and prevention of contagious diseases. Many villagers still resort to private practitioners who are often untrained, or to unregistered medical personnel.<sup>63</sup>

**Exchange 47:** Is there a doctor here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a doctor here?	kaya yahan doctor hai?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahin

## HIV/AIDS

As recently as 2008, India was estimated to have the largest population in the world living with HIV/AIDS. In recent years, however, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS has been decreasing by as much as 57% for new HIV infections and 29% of AIDS-related deaths. Four states in southern India continue to have the highest rates of HIV infections, even though the rates are falling: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. Sex workers, homosexual males, transgendered individuals, people who inject drugs, and long-distance truckers continue to be the highest risk groups in the country.<sup>64, 65, 66</sup>

## Rural Education

Article 21A of the Constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14.<sup>67</sup> Enrollment in rural schools is on the rise, but in 2010 only 63% of all eligible 5-year-old children were enrolled in school. This number



*Classroom with students and teacher  
Flickr / GPE/Deepa Srikantaiah*

increased significantly by 2013, with a 29% increase in private school attendance.<sup>68</sup> Not all students enrolled actually attend school. Estimates of students enrolled but not attending are as high as 25%. Rural parents often prefer to have their children working and contributing to the family income. This is especially true for girls. Since 2013, the attendance rate in rural schools has increased. Estimates state that around 96% of rural children aged 6–14 attend school, while 3.3% do not. The rate of truancy among girls aged 11–14 has also decreased. India’s national “Annual Status of Education Report” estimates that 5.5% of girls in this age group did not attend school. As children move to upper primary school levels and above, attendance drops significantly. In 2013, only 71.8% of children in upper primary levels attended school.<sup>69, 70, 71, 72</sup>

Rural schools in India are affected by numerous hardships. For one, the increase in student attendance has contributed to extreme overcrowding in many schools. Teachers are unable—and sometimes unwilling—to keep up with the number of students they must teach, and teacher truancy is often problematic in many areas. In addition, schools may have only one teacher for the entire school, so if the teacher does not report to work, none of the students will learn. Access to appropriate teaching materials is of concern as well. Learning materials are often in English; yet in rural India, regional languages and Hindi are the dominant languages. Thus, students are unable to comprehend the language of instruction and fall behind. In addition, reading and mathematics scores are very low in many rural areas. This contributes to high dropout rates as students get older. As a result, students have little possibility of obtaining an education and instead often decide to work in support of their family.<sup>73, 74, 75</sup>

### *Village Life*

Villagers in India have a deep loyalty to their village. A family rooted in a particular village does not easily move to another village.<sup>76</sup>

**Exchange 48:** Did you grow up here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did you grow up here?	kaya aap yahin par bare huai hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan





Woman walking with animals  
Flickr / Santanu Sen

Even if people have moved from their village to the city, the village remains an important part of their identity. People will often refer to their ancestral village as “our village.”<sup>77</sup>

**Exchange 49:** Are you and your family planning to move somewhere else?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you and your family planning to move somewhere else?	kaya aap aur aapke parivar wale kahin aur jane walein hain?
<b>Local:</b>	No.	ji nahin

Each village is intricately connected with other villages and cities. Villages are not homogeneous but have a variety of castes, kinship, occupational, and religious groups coexisting. The arrangement of a village depends in part on where it is located. Generally, houses are built close together and roads are only big enough for people or a small cart to pass. Agricultural fields surround the village and are only a short distance away.<sup>78</sup>

### Common Facilities

Indian villagers share common facilities such as the village pond, temples, shrines, cremation grounds, schools, wells, and wastelands. Fellow villagers share their knowledge of common origin and pass on each other’s secrets. Interdependence in rural life provides a sense of unity.<sup>79</sup>

### Village Deity

Each village has a deity that it refers to as the village protector. Regular worship of this deity is considered essential to village prosperity. Villagers often construct temples and shrines to this deity, which is important to the whole village.<sup>80, 81</sup>

### Village Kinship

People of all castes address each other by their village kinship terms. This shows and reflects the relationships that are recognized in each village. There may be as many as 40 castes living in the same village, although it is not unusual for a single caste to dominate.<sup>82</sup>



Elected head of village  
Flickr / UN Women / Gaganjit Singh

## Who is in Charge

Today, the government supports an elective *panchayat* and headman system. These *panchayats* are elected units of local self-government in villages. Each village elects a village council, the *gram panchayat*. Village council chairs are also elected and serve as members of the block council, or the *panchayat samiti*. Blocks are large subunits of a single district. The district council, or *zilla parishad*, is the highest level and has jurisdiction over all village and block councils within a district.<sup>83, 84, 85, 86</sup>

**Exchange 50:** Does your leader live here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your leader live here?	kya aapka leader yahan rahta hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

In many instances, the *panchayat* includes women and very low-caste members. According to a schedule that rotates every few years, a certain percentage of villages must include a woman or Dalit in the *panchayat*.<sup>87, 88</sup>

**Exchange 51:** Can you take me to your leader?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you take me to your leader?	kaya aap mujhe apne leader ke paas leja sakte hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

The *panchayat* acts as a court and hears cases in open sessions, renders decisions, and assigns punishments. The types of offenses over which the *panchayat* has authority include violations of eating, drinking, or smoking laws, infractions of marriage laws, trade rules, killing certain animals, and other common civil cases.<sup>89</sup>

**Exchange 52:** Respected leader, we need your advice.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Respected leader, we need your help/advice/opinion.	pujya leader ji, hamein aapki madad/salah chahiye
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

## Checkpoints

Checkpoints are often found near places that have witnessed violence such as riots or that have tense situations.<sup>90, 91, 92</sup> But there are no checkpoints between states anywhere in India—only at the national borders, such as the Indo-Pakistan border.

**Exchange 53:** Where is the nearest checkpoint?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	sabse nazdiki chauki kahan hai?
<b>Local:</b>	It's two kilometers.	do kilometer dur hogi

The only official land border crossing between Pakistan and India is in Wagah, in the state of Punjab.<sup>93</sup> The border between China and India remains in dispute. Border patrols and checkpoints are heavily fortified in the area.<sup>94</sup> Between Bangladesh and India, there are four border crossings. These are in West Bengal and the Northeast States.

**Exchange 54:** Is this all the ID you have?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this all the ID you have?	kaya aapke paas bas yehi pahichaan patre hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

In some states, there are road tolls that must be paid before entering. For example, there is a toll for entering into New Delhi from Punjab State. Signs at checkpoints or toll stations are usually written in English.<sup>95</sup>

**Exchange 55:** Please get out of the car.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Please get out of the car.	kripa, car se bahir niklein
<b>Local:</b>	OK.	ji achchaa

It is important to stay calm and courteous when asked for IDs and automobile registrations.

**Exchange 56:** Show us the car registration.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Show us the car registration.	car ke registration kagaz dhikhaaiye
<b>Local:</b>	OK.	ji achchaa

## Landmines

India has not signed the Mine Ban Treaty nor has it signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions. India remains one of the few countries still producing antipersonnel mines. The country lays mines along the border areas between Pakistan and Kashmir to deter militants who might enter the country. Between 2001 and 2002, India laid approximately 2 million mines along its northern and western border with Pakistan. Minefields still exist from India's war with China in 1962. They are located along the Tankso Valley, to Spangmik road near Pangong Tso Lake in the Himalayas.<sup>96</sup>

**Exchange 57:** Is this area mined?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this area mined?	kaya eis sathan mein barood laga hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

In 2008, 33 casualties were reported; most were civilians. Between 1999 and 2008, there were an estimated 2,931 mine-related casualties in India. The areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Punjab, and Rajasthan are particularly dangerous.<sup>97</sup>

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# Overview

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## Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Few jobs exist in rural India except in agriculture.

**FALSE**

Most jobs in rural India are in agriculture. However, nearly 25% of all jobs are currently in areas other than agriculture, such as shopkeepers, masonry, carpentry, and services.

2. Rural women usually work more hours than men do.

**TRUE**

Rural women are greatly involved in agricultural activities. In some states, women work as many as 3,485 hours a year, while men work only 1,212 hours.

3. Women are excluded from serving on the local government council.

**FALSE**

In many instances, the *panchayat* or local council includes women as well as members from the lowest castes.

4. Most illness in the countryside is related to contaminated water.

**TRUE**

Around 80% of all illness in the rural areas stems from some sort of waterborne infection. Water supplies are often contaminated and inconsistent.

5. Since independence, the government of India has enacted several land reform measures.

**TRUE**

By the 1970s, the government had instituted reforms that stripped large landowners of ownership of their properties: forests, lakes, and lands.





## CHAPTER 6

*Family on a motorcycle  
Flickr / Nicolas Mirguet*

# Family Life

## Typical Household and Family Structure

Lessons on Indian cultural life are learned within the family. The family is highly valued, consisting of several generations living, working, eating, and worshipping together.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Families typically include men related through the male line, their wives, young children, and unmarried daughters.<sup>3</sup> The most traditional structure (especially outside the cities) is the joint family, in which two or more nuclear families live together in the same household. The extended joint family includes spouses, grandchildren, grandparents, uncles, and aunts. Recent data indicate a decline of the joint family in

recent years. Nuclear families now account for about 70% of all Indian households, while joint families account for about 20% of all households. This breakdown of the joint family is uneven across income groups. Joint families form about 35% of low-income households, but account for nearly 53% of high-income households.<sup>4, 5, 6, 7</sup>

Though a wife usually lives with her husband's relatives, she continues to keep the bond with her birth family. Children live at home until they are married. If the husband dies, the widow usually stays with her in-laws unless or until she remarries.<sup>8, 9, 10</sup>

**Exchange 58:** How many people live in this house?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How many people live in this house?	is ghar mein kitne log rahte hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Ten.	das

## The Typical Household

Indian families are typically large and are well suited for modern Indian life, especially in rural India. For the rural Indian, having the family close by to help with agricultural responsibilities contributes to the family's economic security.<sup>11, 12</sup>

**Exchange 59:** Is this your entire family?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your entire family?	kya yeh aapka sara parivar hai?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan



Large families and family ties may aid in obtaining employment or carrying financial burdens, yet family size is decreasing, particularly in the cities. The average size of families in Delhi is about four people.<sup>13</sup> In absolute terms, the nuclear family is increasingly common in all parts of the country, although the rate of nuclear family growth is increasing slower than overall population growth.<sup>14, 15</sup> Many Indians who live in nuclear families also belong to strong networks of family ties. Relatives often live nearby as neighbors.<sup>16</sup>

*Family on a bike  
Flickr / Mikael Colville-Andersen*

## Gender Roles in the Family

Gender roles in India are fairly specific and well understood. Customarily, a woman is expected to be submissive and to devote herself to keeping her husband happy. Men are expected to take care of the family financially. Once married, women take care of family



*Men socializing  
Flickr / Sandeep Achetan*

needs including cooking, general household tasks, and children. Women have historically been precluded from taking part in business or working outside the home. Customarily, males controlled the family resources, such as land or businesses.<sup>17</sup> Changes in the economic and social structures of the family have allowed more women in the labor force.<sup>18</sup>

*Purdah* practices demonstrate authority and harmony within the family. Female modesty and concepts of family honor are essential. These restrictions are generally stronger for women of high-caste families.<sup>19, 20</sup> Women also suffer from domestic violence. Data show that as many as 40% of women have experienced

violence from an intimate partner. As much as 38% of all men admit to abusing their wives. Domestic violence is on the rise in India.<sup>21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26</sup>

Traditional gender-role divisions are strongest in the rural areas. In the cities, gender roles tend to be more flexible and men may take on more of the responsibilities associated with the home.<sup>27</sup>

## Married Life

Marriage is regarded as a necessity in Indian life and is seen as a relationship between families rather than a relationship between individuals.<sup>28, 29, 30</sup> Most marriages in the northern regions of the country are still arranged within caste divisions. Among the most educated of the country, brides and grooms choose each other rather than having an arranged marriage. Often these marriages cross caste lines.<sup>31</sup> These cross-caste marriages have led to a number of problems including honor killings. Marriages between Hindus and Muslims are not common and neither community endorses them. Yet interfaith marriages are becoming more common among the educated members of the country.<sup>32</sup>

A wedding is a family affair and as many relatives as possible attend. Normally, the



*Wedding ceremony  
Flickr / rajkumar1220*

family of the bride hosts the ceremonies and pays for nearly all arrangements. The groom's family pays a much smaller percentage of the cost.<sup>33, 34, 35, 36</sup>

Typically, once a couple is married, they will move to the home of the groom's family. In some cases, in which the couple is very young, they will stay with their respective parents until they are old enough to live together.<sup>37</sup> The wife is considered the subordinate member of her husband's family.<sup>38</sup> Although she has become part of another household and lineage, she will continue to look to her biological family for moral and economic support.<sup>39</sup>

**Exchange 60:** Is this your wife?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this your wife?	yeh aapki patni hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

By producing children, especially highly valued sons, and ultimately becoming a mother-in-law, a woman gradually improves her position in the household. In motherhood, she finds social approval, economic security, and emotional satisfaction.<sup>40, 41</sup>

**Exchange 61:** Are these your children?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are these your children?	kya yeh aapke bachche hain?
<b>Local:</b>	Yes.	ji haan

All family members work in the family business. Gradually, members of the younger generation take the place of the older generation and become new figures of authority. Once this happens, the younger family members care for and support their parents until their death.<sup>42</sup>

## Divorce

The divorce rate in India has been among the lowest in the world. However, in recent years the stigma surrounding divorce has relaxed and divorce is becoming more common.<sup>43, 44, 45</sup> In India, the methods of divorce vary among the different communities. Online divorces are becoming more popular because

*Sikh Couple  
Flickr / Gurumustuk Singh*



they are often faster and cheaper than the traditional method of filing a divorce petition with the courts. Muslim marriages are dissolved without needing to go to court.<sup>46, 47, 48</sup>

## Birth

A baby's birth is celebrated with welcoming rituals, songs, drums, and gifts. The preparation of horoscopes and including the infant's name in the genealogy records are also common. Children are very much wanted and their presence is regarded as a blessing. Babies are often treated like small gods, and are pampered and adorned with makeup and jewelry.<sup>49, 50</sup>

Birth celebrations for baby daughters are more subdued than for sons. For both boys and girls, infant mortality rates tend to be high. Parents tend to have a large number of children in the hope that at least two sons will survive to adulthood.<sup>51</sup>



*Young baby  
Flickr / Whitney Lauren*

## Funerals

Funeral customs also vary by region and religion. Generally, Hindus cremate their dead, except for small children. Burning the body is seen as a way to help the soul leave the old body. So funerals must be held as quickly as possible, often within hours of dying.<sup>52</sup> In preparation for the cremation, the family washes the body and places flowers on it. Water from the Ganga River is placed in the mouth of the departed and the corpse is carried to the cremation site. The oldest son lights the pyre and scriptural verses are read.<sup>53, 54</sup>



After the body is cremated, the ashes are gathered by a male family member and placed in a pot. Subsequently, these ashes will often be immersed into the waters of one of Hindu's holy rivers, with a priest present.<sup>55, 56</sup> Cremation of the body is often followed by a 13-day mourning period. At this time the family is considered impure, so they avoid attending religious services of any kind and avoid particular foods.<sup>57, 58</sup>

*Cremation site  
Flickr / Dennis Jarvis*

## Family Social Events

Hindu families often observe a number of other special ceremonies. These *samskaras*, or rites of passage, mark the most significant events in life. Though there are as many as



16 *samskaras*, traditionally most families will celebrate only about 8. Other than weddings and funerals, the most common of these include the pre-birth, naming, first grains (first solid food for babies), first hair cutting, starting school, and thread-giving ceremonies (confirmation).<sup>59</sup>

*Mehndi*  
*Flickr / mehnam786*

### *Weddings*

Marriage is a significant event in Hindu culture. Preparations start weeks before the wedding date and relatives often come to help. For most young Hindu couples, marriages are arranged between the parents of the bride and groom and a Brahmin (priest), although marriages based on mutual affection are now more common. Arranged marriages also take the castes of the two families into consideration, although discrimination based on caste is outlawed. Marriages between castes, typical of “love marriages,” are generally frowned upon. A bride dowry is still widely practiced, even though it also is now illegal in India.<sup>60</sup>

A day before the wedding, *mehndi* (also known as henna, an organic dye) is applied on the palms and feet of the bride in ornate patterns, to beautify them. In certain regions of India, the groom is also painted. This practice is also a part of the pre-wedding ritual for Sikh and Muslim weddings.<sup>61, 62</sup>

There are a tremendous number of regional variations related to traditional Hindu weddings. Typically, the groom arrives at the bride’s house or wedding hall mounted on a horse and wearing fine clothes, followed by his family, relatives, musicians, and guests in a procession called a *baraat*. The relatives of the bride welcome the *baraat*. (Similar pre-wedding processions occur in Sikh and Muslim weddings.) The wedding ceremony takes place under a *mandap* (a four-pillared, canopy-like structure). The parents of the bride give their daughter away in a ritual known as *kanya daan*. The wedding ceremony includes recitations of mantras by priests. During these, the bride and groom make offerings to a sacred fire (*agni*), around which they take seven steps as they recite the wedding vows (*saptapadi*).<sup>63</sup>

After the wedding, the bride leaves her home to live with her husband and in-laws. The bride’s first entrance into her new home and new life is termed *griha pravesh* (entering the home). The bride crosses the threshold with her right foot first, because this is believed to bring good fortune, and is welcomed by the groom’s mother.<sup>64</sup>

## Status of Children, Young Adults, and the Elderly

### Children

Children are highly valued in Indian society, especially if they are boys. In general, children enjoy a permissive childhood. They are not encouraged to be self-reliant and



*Children laughing  
Flickr / Brett Davies*

independent. The family helps the child to develop his or her personality. Parents and other family members try to influence the child's values and belief system within the broader constraints of the Hindu belief system.<sup>65</sup> Children are sometimes seen as a source of security for the parents as they age. Therefore, children are also viewed as a resource for the family.<sup>66</sup>

Children are often indulged by parents and other family members until about the age of 5. Then, children are expected to take on some responsibility and to help with family chores. Rural children often help in the fields. Girls learn household tasks and boys learn to take care of the family's animals. In urban settings, some children work as servants, or go out to pick through garbage and scavenge items that will be useful to their families. It has also been reported that some children as young as 4 work in industries.<sup>67</sup>

### Young Adults

The special nature of adolescence is recognized in Indian society and there are specific regulations regarding behavior. This code of conduct generally involves celibacy and learning the traditions of the family and culture. Girls usually find their activities more restricted and they take on more responsibility for work related to the home. On the other hand, boys find that they have more freedom. It is during this time that Indian boys begin to take on more adult roles and to look for occupational pursuits.<sup>68</sup> The experience of adolescence can vary greatly depending on social class, region of the country, and caste. Among the poor, many teenagers will drop out of school to work.<sup>69</sup>



*Young girl in Delhi  
Flickr / Zuhair Ahmad*

Adolescence is also when young people in India are preparing for or entering into marriage. Although the legal age for marriage for women is 18, many marry younger. As many as 45% of girls marry and begin living with their husbands before age 18, a trend that is more pronounced in rural India. This means that adolescence is brief before Indians enter into more traditional adult roles.<sup>70, 71, 72</sup>

## Elderly



The traditional values of Indian society include respect for the elderly, and it was usual for elderly, relatives to live with, and be cared for, by younger family members. Even today, the most common living arrangement is for parents to live with sons and their families.<sup>73</sup> Modernization, urbanization, and changes in society are making it less likely that the elderly will enjoy the same levels of respect and security as in earlier times. The increasing population of the aged in the country, along with other pressures, is likely to change the condition of the elderly in the future. But for now, the elderly continue to depend on their younger family members for care.<sup>74,75</sup>

*Elderly man and young boy*  
Flickr / UN Photo/John Isaac

## Naming Conventions

In India, names can vary depending upon one's religion, social class, caste, and region of the country. Despite these wide variations, there are common naming conventions. Naming a child is an important ritual and Indians will often have more than one name. These names may signify class, rank, wealth, and so on.<sup>76</sup>

Hindi speakers commonly follow a style akin to that in Western countries with a surname, middle name, and family name. Those with caste names as their last names are now frequently changing their last names, to obscure their caste heritage. Women typically take their husband's last name at marriage, but a growing number of professional women retain their maiden names.<sup>77</sup> Hindus believe in reincarnation, so ancestral names are common because they represent the idea that dead family members may be reborn in children.<sup>78</sup> Muslims in India often lack surnames. Instead, many Muslims will add the father's name to their own with the connecting word "bin" if male and "binti" if female.<sup>79</sup>

All male Sikhs use the name Singh either as a surname or as a connector to an existing surname.<sup>80</sup> All female Sikhs use the name Kaur in similar fashion. First names for Sikh children are often chosen from the writing of Guru Arjun. The book containing Arjun's writings is opened at random and the child will be given a name that begins with the first letter of the first word on the left page to which the book was opened.<sup>81,82</sup>

*Baby girl*  
Flickr / Vinoth Chandar





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# Overview

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## Chapter 6 Assessment

1. Few marriages in modern India are arranged.

**FALSE**

Most marriages in India are arranged, although couples have the right to refuse the choice of spouse if they wish.

2. Indian divorce rates are high.

**FALSE**

The Indian divorce rate is one of the lowest in the world. Only about 1 in every 100 marriages ends in divorce.

3. Children are highly prized by Indian families.

**TRUE**

Children are loved and bring great joy to the families.

4. Marriage by people under the age of 18 is rare in contemporary India.

**FALSE**

The legal age for girls to marry is 18 and for boys it is 21, yet many people marry at younger ages.

5. Naming conventions for Hindi speakers are similar to those of most Western cultures.

**TRUE**

Hindi speakers commonly follow a style akin to that in Western countries with a surname, middle name, and family name.

# Hindi-India Cultural Orientation

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## Final Assessment

1. Hindi is the third most widely spoken language in the world.

**TRUE**

In India, about 41% of the population speaks Hindi, while world-wide 600 million people may speak the language or one of its dialects.

2. Hindi is widely spoken in the southern half of the country.

**FALSE**

Hindi is mostly spoken in the nine states located in the northern portions of the country.

3. The British were the first to establish trade relations in what is now known as India.

**FALSE**

The Portuguese landed on the Western coast of India in 1498; they built a chain of outposts but were defeated by the British navy in 1612.

4. The All-India Muslim League was founded in an attempt to counterbalance the influence of the Indian National Congress.

**TRUE**

The All-India Muslim League was founded by Muslims who feared their civil rights and religious practices were threatened by Hindu majority rule.

5. Kashmir is a point of serious disagreement between India and Pakistan.

**TRUE**

India and Pakistan have fought several wars over the area, and Kashmir remains in dispute to this date.

6. Nearly 81% of Indians are Hindus.

**TRUE**

Hinduism traces its roots to India. The next largest religion, Islam, is practiced by only about 13% of the population.

7. Hindus worship one God.

**FALSE**

Unlike Christians or Muslims, most Hindus do not worship a single god. There are many gods and goddesses that are revered in the Hindu religion.

8. Most Indian Muslims are Sunni Muslims.

**TRUE**

The majority of Muslims in India follow the Sunni sect.

9. India's constitution guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens.

**TRUE**

India's constitution declares India to be a secular state and guarantees freedom of religion to all.

10. The religious book or texts of the Sikh religion are called *Gurdwaras*.

**FALSE**

A *gurdwara* is a Sikh temple or shrine. The Sikh holy book is called the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

11. The caste system is observed more in rural areas than in urban cities.

**TRUE**

The people in cities tend to be less concerned with caste identification than do people in the rural areas.

12. *Purdah* refers to a system of veiling women.

**TRUE**

Hinduism, like Islam, values modesty. Some Hindus practice the system of veiling women to outsiders.

13. The typical form of greeting is referred to as *Namaste*.

**TRUE**

This is a very common way of greeting throughout the country. Place your two palms together in front of your heart and bow slightly.

14. White flowers are acceptable as gifts to bring to an Indian's house.

**FALSE**

White is a color associated with mourning and funerals. Both the colors of white and black should be avoided.

15. All Hindus are cremated after death.

**FALSE**

Although most Hindus are cremated after death, most babies are buried rather than being cremated.

16. Travelling in Delhi is safe for women.

**FALSE**

Delhi is not safe for women especially if they are travelling alone. Women are frequently harassed.

17. Most Indians tend to shop every day.

**TRUE**

Local markets are full almost every day with Indians who are buying enough food for their daily meals.

18. More than one-third of all Indian students will drop out of school by the age of 10.

**TRUE**

About 39% of all students will drop out by the time they are 10 years old, contributing to the high illiteracy rate in the country.

19. Most residents of Indian cities have access to standard Western medical care.

**FALSE**

Although the level of medical care in Indian cities is quite high, most Indians are not lucky enough to have access.

20. Kolkata is the largest city in India.

**FALSE**

Kolkata is the third-largest city with a population of about 15.3 million.

21. Most villages in India have primary and secondary schools.

**FALSE**

Most villages in India do have primary schools; however, only about 65% have a secondary school within 5 kilometers.

22. About 95% of all villages have some kind of health care provider.

**TRUE**

Although this is true, many of the centers are not fully staffed and only 43% of all centers actually have a doctor.

23. Bicycles are the most widely used form of personal transportation in the rural areas.

**FALSE**

In the last 20 years, the bicycle has been replaced with motorized two-wheel vehicles such as scooters and mopeds.

24. After a traffic accident, it is best to stay until the police arrive to take a report.

**FALSE**

It has commonly been reported that villagers have attacked drivers involved in accidents, especially if they involve hitting either a child or a cow.

25. The local units of government in rural areas are called *panchayats*.

**TRUE**

A panchayat is an elected unit of self-government in the villages. The panchayat may include both women and low-caste members.

26. Women in India are usually responsible for taking care of the house and the children.

**TRUE**

Indian gender roles are traditional; women are expected to be submissive and keep their husbands happy, and to take care of the children and the house.



27. Online divorces are becoming a popular alternative in India.

**TRUE**

Online divorces are popular because they are cheaper and often faster than the traditional method of divorce.

28. Boys are generally more valued than girls.

**TRUE**

Boys are seen as able to contribute to the income of a family and to secure the family's future. They require no marriage dowry.

29. Hindu names for boys usually end in an "a" or an "i".

**FALSE**

Girls' names usually end in "a" or "i" and often have three syllables; males usually have two-syllable names inspired by the names of Hindu gods.

30. Joint families are common in India.

**FALSE**

Although joint families are the traditional family structure in India, they are on the decline. Nuclear families are becoming more common, especially in the cities.

# Hindi Cultural Orientation

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## Further Reading and Resources

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