



Location: Southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, between Burma and Pakistan

Area Total: 3,287,590 sq km

Area - comparative: slightly more than one-third the size of the US.

Climate: Varies from tropical monsoon in south to temperate in north.

Terrain: upland plain (Deccan Plateau) in south, flat to rolling plain along the Ganges, deserts in west, Himalayas in north.

Religions: Hindu 80.5%, Muslim 13.4%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.9%, other 1.8%, unspecified 0.1% (2001 census).

Languages: English enjoys associate status but is the most important language for national, political, and commercial communication; Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people; there are 14 other official languages: Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, and Sanskrit; Hindustani is a popular variant of Hindi/Urdu spoken widely throughout northern India but is not an official language.



India is the second most populous country in the world, with a population of just above one billion people. It is also one of the largest countries by land area and is also one of the largest world economies. India became an independent nation on August 15, 1947 after a long struggle for independence led by the Indian National Congress Party (also known as Congress). The first Prime Minister of India was Jawaharlal Nehru, who along with Mohandas K. Gandhi (known as "Mahatma") led the freedom struggle. India was a self-governing dominion within the British Empire from 1947 to 1950. The last viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, acted as Governor-General of India, and was the queen's representative in the newly independent dominion. In 1950, India drafted a new constitution and became a republic within the British Commonwealth of Nations, an organization of former British colonies and dominions.

Where does the name "India" come from?

A river that flowed through the region was known in Sanskrit as *Sindhu*. The Greeks were the first Europeans to visit the area and called this river the *Sinthos*. This was later changed by the Romans into *Indus*, the name which is now commonly used for this river. The region thus became known in Latin as *India*. The Persians and Arabs called the region *Al-Hind* after the same river. Originally, *Al-Hind* referred to both South and Southeast Asia, from present-day Pakistan down through Indonesia. The word *Hindu* came to describe the people who lived here and the religions they practiced. During Muslim rule of most of India, they referred to India as "Hindustan", the land of the Hindus. Ironically, the river which gave India its name now flows through Pakistan.

A new nation shaped by its past

Throughout India's history, many different groups have migrated and settled in its fertile plains, and also bringing their own cultures with them. Outside of India, many people speak about "Indian culture" as if it were only one thing, type of thought, and way of doing things. India's history is filled with interactions between different groups of people. All of them have contributed something to the cultures found in India. India's cultures are also influenced by its geography, especially aspects like clothing style and food. In many cases, Indian restaurants have popularized the type of cuisine known as *Mughlai*, which comes from one region of northern India which has Muslim influence from Persia and Central Asia.

India's government

India's government is a parliamentary democracy based on the British system of government. In the United States, the President is both the head of state AND the head of government. Whereas in India, like the British model, these offices are divided among two persons. The Prime Minister is the head of government and the President of India is the head of state.

India was one of the first nations in the world to have a woman as its leader. Indira Gandhi (no relation to Mahatma Gandhi) who was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, served as India's prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 to 1984. After independence, the Indian National Congress Party, was the most powerful of India's political parties and held most of the seats in India's parliament. Throughout fifty years of independence, many more political parties have sprung up in India representing and speaking for the interests of many different groups who felt that the Congress Party did not represent their views. Many of these new political parties are based on region and ethnicity, social class or caste, or religion.