

INDIA

A Dynamic Democracy



In its quest for modernisation, India has preserved its ancient civilization and never lost sight of the ideals that gave her strength through countless centuries. Science and technology provide the tools for improving the lot of its people. But the nation of over one billion continues to live with some of its traditions that go back 4,000 years, and more.

In a world where nations, big and small, are breaking into micro entities, often with disastrous consequences, India has demonstrated its inherent resilience. This strength comes from its composite culture that has made India a truly vibrant democracy.

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A DYNAMIC DEMOCRACY

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INDIA
A DYNAMIC DEMOCRACY



Land & People

HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY
&
NATIONAL SYMBOLS



History

The history of India is shrouded in antiquity. The country has been thought of as a nation of philosophers with a well-developed and even idyllic society. Excavations of sites belonging to the Harappan era show that the people lived in brick houses in towns with excellent drainage. One of the oldest scriptures in the world is the four-volume Vedas that many regard as the repository of national thoughts that anticipated many of the modern scientific discoveries. Despite formidable barriers in the form of the mighty Himalayas and

the oceans, India received a succession of foreigners, many of them wielding the sword. Out of these waves of immigration has emerged the composite culture of India and made it a land of unity in diversity. India became a land of assimilation and learning, a land of change and continuity. The Aryans were among the first to arrive in India which was inhabited by the Dravidians. Others who came here included Greeks, Persians, Mughals and even British, Portuguese and French. Over the years there have been many major ruling dynasties like the Shakas, the Kushans, the Mauryas and Guptas. Nearly every major religion in the world is represented in India which is also the land of the Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira and Guru Nanak Dev, the founders of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, respectively.



Physical Features

India, with an area of 3.3 million sq. km, is a subcontinent. The peninsula is separated from mainland Asia by the Himalayas. The country lies between 8°4' and 37°6' north of the Equator and is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal in the east, the Arabian Sea in the west and the Indian Ocean to the south.

The Himalayas form the highest mountain range in the world, extending 2,500 km over northern India. Bounded by the Indus river in the west and the Brahmaputra in the east, the three parallel ranges, the Himadri, Himachal and Shivaliks have deep canyons gorged by the rivers flowing into the Gangetic plain.

View of the three Bhagirathi peaks from the Ganga valley



On the shore of Lake Moriri in Ladakh



River Systems

The river systems may be classified as: (a) the Himalayan rivers, which are snow-fed and perennial and prone to flooding during the monsoon (June to September); (b) the Deccan rivers, rain-fed, fluctuating in volume and largely non-perennial; (c) the coastal rivers of limited catchment areas which are generally short (especially on the western coast); and (d) the rivers of the inland drainage basin are few and ephemeral. They drain towards individual basins or salt lakes like the one in Sambhar in Rajasthan or are lost in the sands, having no outlet to the sea.

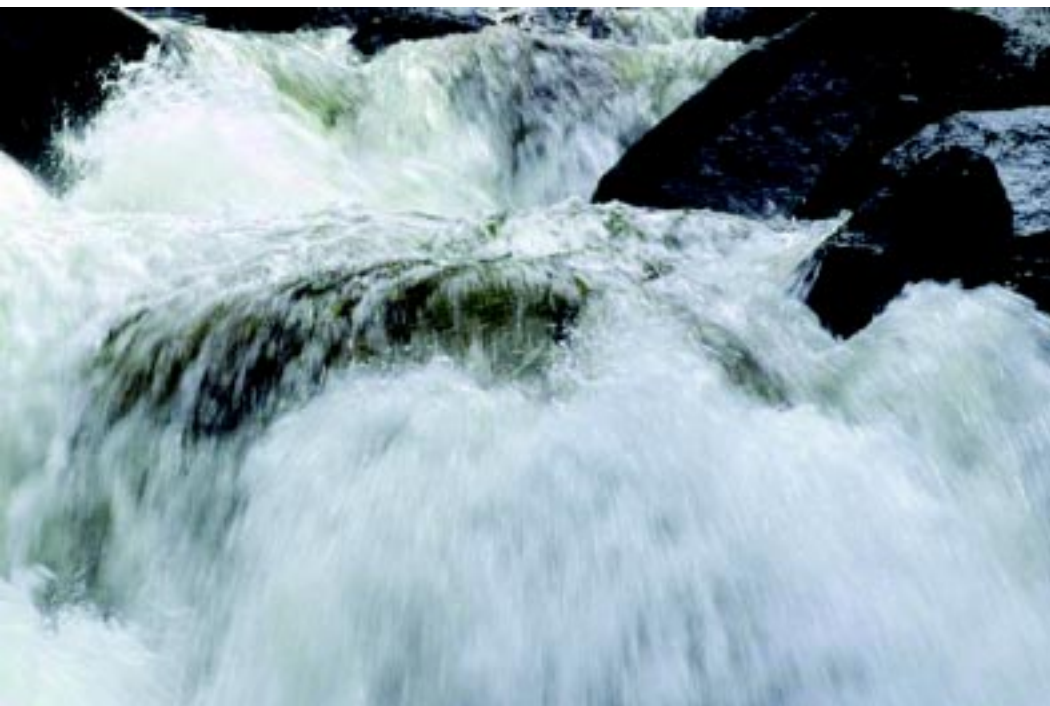
Climate

The Himalayan range in the north acts as the perfect meteorological barrier for the whole country. Despite the country's size and its varied relief, the seasonal rhythm of the monsoon is apparent throughout. Although much of northern India lies beyond the tropical zone, the entire country has a tropical climate marked by relatively high temperatures and dry winters.

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Autumn in the Kumaon hills



Near the source of the Ganga at Gangotri

Natural Vegetation

The Himalayan region, which is rich in vegetative life, possesses varieties that can be found practically from the tropical to tundra regions. In the rest of the country, the type of vegetation is largely determined by the amount of rainfall. Outside the Himalayan region; the country has three major vegetation regions: the tropical wet evergreen and semi-evergreen forests, the tropical deciduous forests, and the thorn forests and shrubs.



India is characterised by a variety of racial types, cultures and languages

People

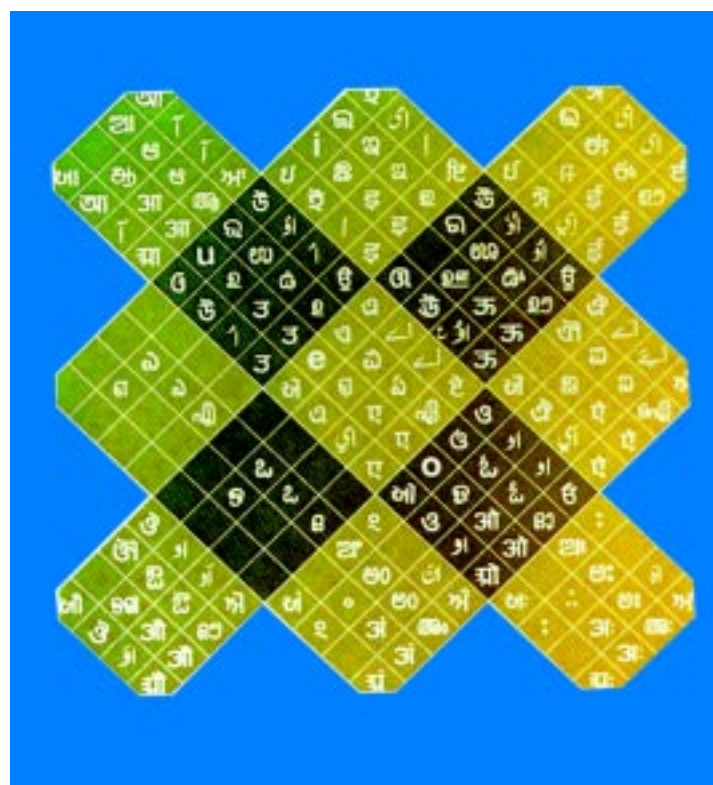
India is a country with probably the largest and most diverse mixture of races. All the five major racial types - Australoid, Mongoloid, Europoid, Caucasian and Negroid - find representation among the people of India.

Languages

India has 18 major languages. In addition to the officially recognised languages, over 1650 dialects are also spoken across the country. The Sanskrit of the Aryan settlers has merged with the earlier Dravidian vernaculars to give rise to new languages.

Hindi, spoken by about 45 per cent of the population, is the national language. English has also been retained as a language for official communication. More people read and write English in India than in many English speaking countries!

Indian literature dates back several millennia to the hymns of the vedic Aryans. The oral tradition nurtured classical literature, and produced great works of philosophy and religious doctrine. It also accounted for compilations of anecdotes like the Panchatantra and the Jataka tales, as well as epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In southern India, the creative energies of the Tamil poets found expression in the great works of Sangam literature. The epic Tirukkural by Tiruvalluvar is a masterpiece of this age. In the north, dramatists like Kalidasa produced great dramas in Sanskrit.



Calligraphic comparison of the different scripts in India

Religions

Hinduism: The Hindu religion had its origin in the concepts of the early Aryans who came to India more than 4,000 years ago. It is not merely a religion but also a philosophy and a way of life. Hinduism does not originate in the teachings of any one prophet or holy book. It respects other religions and does not attempt to seek converts. It teaches the immortality of the human soul and three principal paths to ultimate union of the individual soul with the all-pervasive spirit.



An Ancient Hindu temple



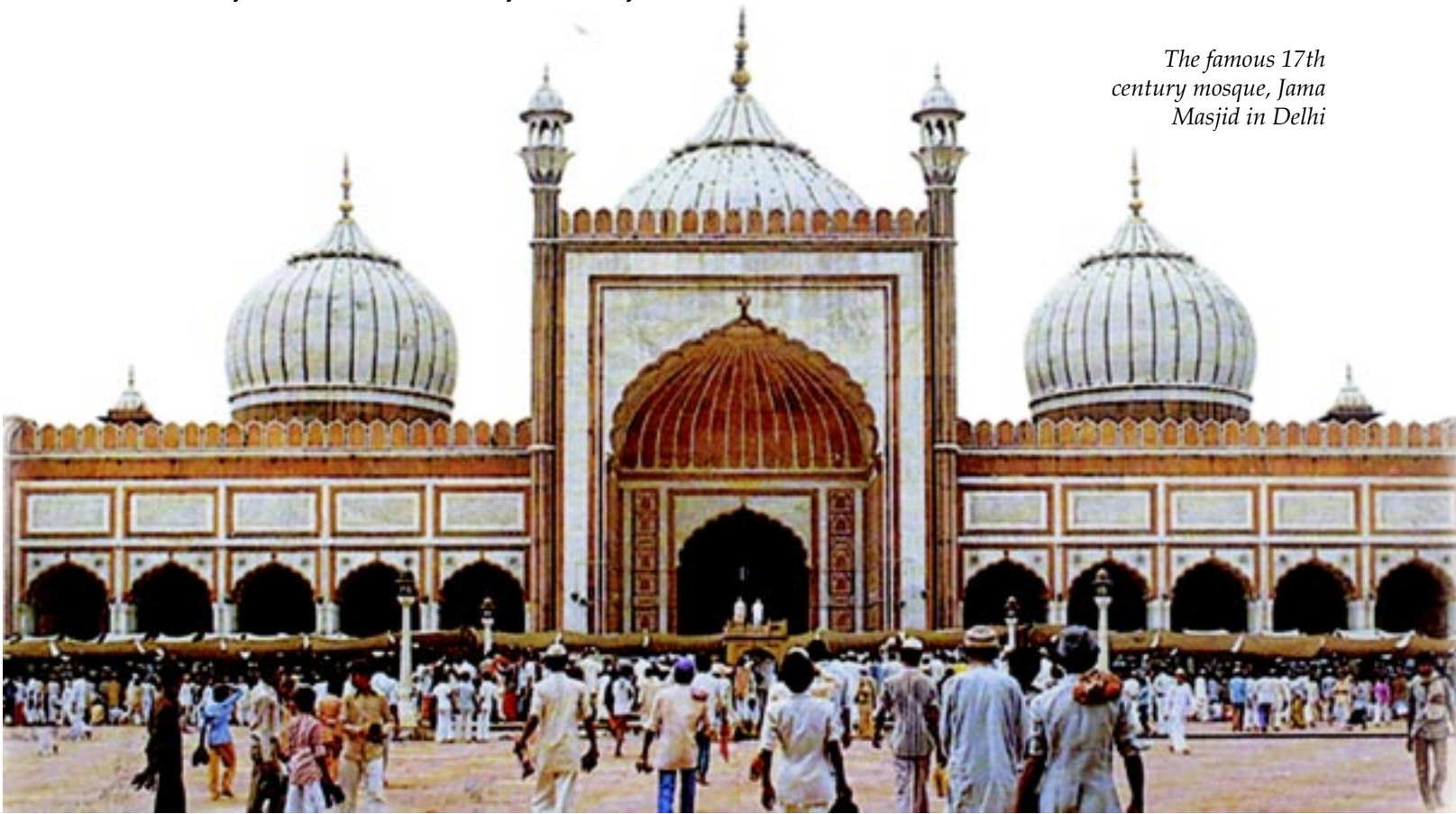
Engraving a Buddhist religious text

Jainism and Buddhism: In the sixth century before Christ, Mahavira propagated Jainism. Its message was asceticism, austerity and non-violence. At about the same time, Buddhism came into being. Gautam Buddha, a prince, renounced the world and gained enlightenment. He preached that 'Nirvana' was to be attained through the conquest of self. Buddha's teachings in time spread to China and many other countries of Far- and South-East Asia.

Islam: Arab traders brought Islam to South India in the seventh century. After them came the Afghans and the Moghuls, among who the most enlightened was Emperor Akbar who almost succeeded in founding a new religion Din-e-Elahi, based on both Hinduism and Islam. Islam has flourished in India through the centuries. Muslim citizens have occupied some of the highest positions in the country since independence in 1947.

The essence of Hindu faith is embodied in the Lord's Song, the Bhagavad Gita: "He who considers this (self) as a slayer or he who thinks that this (self) is slain, neither knows the Truth. For it does not slay, nor is it slain. This (self) is unborn, eternal, changeless, ancient, it is never destroyed even when the body is destroyed."

The famous 17th century mosque, Jama Masjid in Delhi



Sikhism: Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism in the 15th century, stressed the unity of God and the brotherhood of man. Sikhism, with its affirmation of God as the one supreme truth and its ideals of discipline and spiritual striving, soon won many followers. It was perhaps possible only in this hospitable land that the new religion could draw heavily on the Bhakti as well as the Sufi movements.

Christianity: Christianity reached India not long after Christ's own lifetime, with the arrival of St. Thomas, the Apostle. The Syrian Christian Church in the south traces its roots to the visit of St. Thomas. With the arrival of St. Francis Xavier in 1542 the Roman Catholic faith was established in India. Today Christians of several denominations practise their faith freely.

Zoroastrianism: In the days of the old Persian Empire, Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion in West Asia, and in the form of Mithraism, it spread over vast areas of the Roman Empire, far homeland and sought refuge in India. The first group is said to have reached Diu in about 766 A.D. The total number of Zoroastrians today probably does not exceed 130,000. With the exception of some 10,000 in Iran, almost all of them live in India, the vast majority concentrated in Mumbai. The Parsees, as Zoroastrians are called in India, excel in industry and commerce, and contribute richly to the intellectual and artistic life of the nation.

Judaism: Jewish contact with the Malabar Coast in Kerala dates back to 973 BC when King Solomon's merchant fleet began trading for spices and other fabled treasures. Scholars say that the Jews first settled in Cranganore, soon after the Babylonian conquest of Judea in

The Sisganj Gurudwara in Delhi, an important Sikh shrine

Pawapuri, the birth place of Mahavira