



# India—Past and Present

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

India is trying to develop its resources to meet the needs of its rapidly growing population.

### Terms to Know

- subcontinent
- monsoon
- green revolution
- jute
- cottage industry
- pesticide
- caste
- reincarnation

### Reading Strategy

Create a chart like this one. Then fill in at least two key facts about India under each category.

India	
Land	Economy
History	Religion



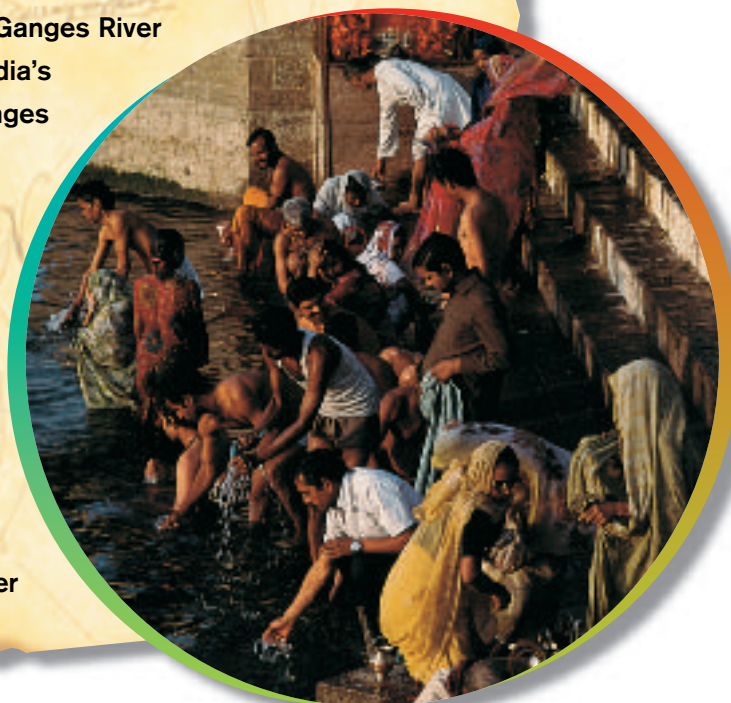
## Exploring our World

Stone steps lead to the Ganges River

at this village in India. India's Hindus consider the Ganges River to be a holy river.

Millions of Hindus from all areas of India come to pray and bathe in its waters every year.

People also use the river to do their laundry. In addition, industries dump waste into it. Today there is grave concern that the holy river is seriously polluted.



**I**ndia and several other countries—Pakistan, Bangladesh (BAHNG•gluh•DEHSH), Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives—make up the South Asian subcontinent. A **subcontinent** is a large landmass that is part of another continent but distinct from it.

## India's Land and Economy

Two huge walls of mountains—the **Karakoram** (KAH•rah•KOHR•ahm) **Range** and the **Himalaya** (HIH•muh•LAY•uh)—form India's northern border and separate South Asia from the rest of Asia. (See the map on page 479.) The tallest mountains in the world, the Himalaya's snowcapped peaks average more than 5 miles (8 km) in height. Edging India's southern coasts are the **Eastern Ghats** and the **Western Ghats**. In central India, the **Satpura Range** divides the country.

North of the Satpura lies the vast **Ganges Plain**. It boasts some of the most fertile soil in the country and holds about 40 percent of India's



people. The **Ganges River** flows through the Ganges Plain to the **Bay of Bengal**. South of the Satpura Range lies the **Deccan Plateau**. Forests, farmland, and rich deposits of minerals make it a valuable region.

Most of India is warm or hot all year. The Himalaya block cold northern air from sweeping south into the country. **Monsoons**, or seasonal winds that blow steadily from the same direction for months, also influence the climate. During the rainy season (June through September), southern monsoon winds bring moist air from the Indian Ocean. The map on page 464 shows monsoon patterns for summer and winter.

**The Green Revolution** Today India produces most of the food it needs. In the past, it was very different. The world's worst recorded food disaster, known as the Bengal Famine, occurred in 1943 when the United Kingdom ruled India. An estimated 4 million people died of starvation that year alone. When India won its independence in 1947, government officials turned their attention to improving India's farm output.

The **green revolution** was an effort to use modern techniques and science to increase production of food.

The government built dams to collect monsoon rains. The dams stored the water and spread it out through irrigation ditches during the dry season. Farmers could then plant more than one crop each year. New, stronger strains of wheat, rice, and corn were also developed that could withstand diseases and droughts and produce more grains.

India's farmers today raise a variety of crops, including rice, wheat, cotton, tea, sugarcane, and jute. **Jute** is a plant fiber used for making rope, burlap bags, and carpet backing. India is the world's second-largest rice producer, after China.

**Industry** Huge factories in India's cities turn out cotton textiles and produce iron and steel. Oil and sugar refineries loom over many urban skylines. Recently, many American computer companies have opened offices in India. Mining is another major industry. India has rich deposits of coal, iron ore, manganese, and bauxite. Its major exports are gems and jewelry.

Many Indian products are manufactured in cottage industries. A **cottage industry** is a home- or village-based industry in which family members, including children, supply their own equipment to make goods. Items produced in cottage industries include cotton cloth, silk cloth, rugs, leather products, and metalware.

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC On Location**



**Two Views of India**

The growing middle class lives comfortably in India's suburbs (above), but the poor in India's cities must struggle to survive (above left).

**Human/Environment Interaction**  
How would the green revolution benefit India's people?



▲ This statue represents Siva, one of Hinduism's many deities.

**Environmental Challenges** India's economic growth has created challenges to its environment. Thousands of acres of forests have been cleared for farming. Both water and land have been polluted from industrial wastes and **pesticides**, or chemicals used to kill insects that destroy crops. Burning coal is also harmful. The Ganges River is considered by many experts to be one of the world's most polluted rivers.

All of these developments have played a part in destroying animal habitats. India's elephants, lions, tigers, leopards, monkeys, and panthers have been greatly reduced in number. The government has set up more than 350 national parks and preserves to save these animals.

✓ **Reading Check** How has economic growth hurt India's environment?

## India's History and People

About 4,000 years ago, the first Indian civilization built well-planned cities along the **Indus River** valley in present-day Pakistan. In the 1500s B.C., warriors known as Aryans (AR•ee•uhns) entered the subcontinent from Central Asia. They set up kingdoms in northern India. Aryan beliefs gradually blended with the practices of the local people to form the religion of Hinduism.

Over time, Hinduism organized India's society into groups called castes. A **caste** is a social class based on a person's ancestry. Under such a system, people are born into a particular caste, which determines the jobs they can hold and whom they can marry. The caste system still influences Indian life, although laws now forbid unfair treatment of "lower" castes.

About 80 percent of India's people today are Hindus. Hindus honor many gods and goddesses, including Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer. Hinduism teaches that after the body dies, the soul is reborn, often in an animal or human form. This process, called **reincarnation**, is repeated until the soul

## EXPLORING CULTURE

### Clothing

What is more comfortable than a pair of well-worn blue jeans? Denim—the strong blue cotton fabric—is part of modern life. Blue-dyed textiles (fabrics) are nothing new, however. They were being produced in India as long ago as 2700 B.C. Ancient Indians were among the first in the world to master techniques for dyeing cotton and other types of fabric. Using more than 300 different plants, Indian textile makers created brilliant fabric dyes. They also discovered how to make dyes permanent, so they would not wash out.

**Looking Closer** Look at the Country Profiles on pages 466–468. Which countries' main export is cotton, textiles, or clothing?





## Leaders of India

Indira Gandhi (left), Mohandas Gandhi (center), and Jawaharlal Nehru (right) were instrumental in bringing democracy to India.

**History** Which country ruled India before it won its independence?

reaches perfection. For this reason, many Hindus believe it is wrong to kill any living creature. Cows are viewed as sacred and roam freely.

Buddhism started in India about 500 B.C. but largely declined there by 300 B.C. The religion of Islam has had much more influence on India's history. In the A.D. 700s, Muslims from Southwest Asia brought Islam to India. In the 1500s, they founded the Mogul Empire and ruled India for 200 years.

Today India's 140 million followers of Islam form one of the world's largest Muslim populations. Other religions include Christianity, Sikhism (SEE•KIH•zuhm), Buddhism, and Jainism (JY•NIH•zuhm). Conflict sometimes occurs among members of India's different religious groups. The Sikhs, who practice Sikhism, believe in one God as Christians and Muslims do, yet Sikhs also have other beliefs similar to Hindus. Many Sikhs would like to form their own country.

Religion has influenced the arts of India. Ancient Hindu builders constructed temples with hundreds of statues. Hindu writers composed stories about deities. Among Muslim achievements are large mosques, palaces, and forts. One of the finest Muslim buildings in India is the Taj Mahal. Turn to page 477 to learn more about this building.

**Independence** The British were the last of India's conquerors, ruling from the 1700s to the mid-1900s. They built roads, railroads, and seaports. They also made large profits from the plantations, mines, and factories they set up. An Indian leader named Mohandas Gandhi led a nonviolent movement to free India from Britain's rule. His efforts brought India independence from the United Kingdom in 1947.

Before independence, the British government had decided to divide India into two countries—one Hindu (India) and one Muslim (East and West Pakistan). After independence, millions of Hindus fled toward India. Muslims migrated toward Pakistan. Violence resulted from these mass migrations, and more than a million people were killed.




**Government** India has 25 states and 7 territories. **New Delhi** was built specifically to be the country's capital. India is a representative democracy. The head of state is a president, whose duties are mainly ceremonial. The real power lies with the prime minister. The first prime minister of India was Jawaharlal Nehru, who was elected in 1947. His daughter, Indira Gandhi, was also prime minister. She led India almost continually from 1966 until her assassination in 1984.

**Daily Life** More than 1 billion people call India their home. The country has 18 official languages, of which Hindi is the most widely used. English is often spoken in business and government, however. About 70 percent of the people live in rural villages. The government has been working to provide villagers with electricity, drinking water, better schools, and paved roads. Still, many villagers move to cities to find jobs and a better standard of living.

India's cities are very crowded. Bicycles, carts, animals, and people fill the streets. **Mumbai** (formerly Bombay), **Delhi**, **Calcutta**, and **Chennai** each have more than 5 million people and are growing rapidly. Modern high-rise buildings tower over slum areas where many live in deep poverty. In 1979 the well-known missionary Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to help the poor in Calcutta.

One of the most popular holidays is Diwali (dee•VAH•lee), the Festival of Lights. It is a Hindu celebration marking the coming of winter and the victory of good over evil. Indians also like watching movies. India's movie industry turns out more films than Hollywood.

 **Reading Check** What percentage of India's people live in rural villages?

**Section**  
**1**

## Assessment

### Defining Terms

1. **Define** subcontinent, monsoon, green revolution, jute, cottage industry, pesticide, caste, reincarnation.

### Recalling Facts

2. **Location** What two mountain ranges form India's northern border?
3. **Culture** What is the most widely followed religion in India?
4. **History** Which Indian leader led a movement that brought India its independence in 1947?

### Critical Thinking

5. **Understanding Cause and Effect** How do monsoon winds affect India's climate?
6. **Drawing Conclusions** What challenges do you think the caste system caused?

### Graphic Organizer

7. **Organizing Information** India is becoming a more modern country but still has many traditional ways. Create a chart like this one. Then list both modern and traditional aspects of India.

Modern Aspects	Traditional Aspects



### Applying Social Studies Skills

8. **Analyzing Maps** Look at the population density map on page 487. Where are the most densely populated areas of India?