

India



OFFICIAL NAME:

[Republic of India](#)

Geography

Area: 3.29 million sq. km. (1.27 million sq. mi.); about one-third the size of the U.S.

Cities: *Capital*--New Delhi (pop. 12.8 million, 2001 census). *Other major cities*--Mumbai, formerly Bombay (16.4 million); Kolkata, formerly Calcutta (13.2 million); Chennai, formerly Madras (6.4 million); Bangalore (5.7 million); Hyderabad (5.5 million); Ahmedabad (5 million); Pune (4 million).

Terrain: Varies from Himalayas to flat river valleys and deserts in the west.

Climate: Alpine to temperate to subtropical monsoon.

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*--Indian(s).

Population (2007): 1.14 billion; urban 27.8%.

Annual growth rate: 1.3%

Density: 324/sq. km.

Ethnic groups: Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, others 3%. While the national census does not recognize racial or ethnic groups, it is estimated that there are more than 2,000 ethnic groups in India.

Religions: Hindu 81.4%, Muslim 12.4%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.9%, other groups including Buddhist, Jain, Parsi within 1%.

Languages: Hindi, English, and 16 other official languages.

Education: *Years compulsory*--none. *Literacy* — 64.84%.

Health: *Infant mortality rate*--34.61/1,000. *Life expectancy*--68.59 years (2007 est.).

Work force (est.): 450 million. *Agriculture*--60%; *industry and commerce*--18%; *services and government*--22%

PEOPLE

Although India occupies only 2.4% of the world's land area, it supports over 15% of the world's population. Only China has a larger population. India's median age is 25, one of the youngest among large economies. About 70%



The Taj Mahal is reflected in a pool in Agra, India, June 25, 2003. [© AP Images]



live in more than 550,000 villages, and the remainder in more than 200 towns and cities. Over the thousands of years of its history, India has been invaded from the Iranian plateau, Central Asia, Arabia, Afghanistan, and the West; Indian people and culture have absorbed and modified these influences to produce a remarkable racial and cultural synthesis.

Religion, caste, and language are major determinants of social and political organization in India today. However, with more job opportunities in the private sector and better chances of upward social mobility, India has begun a quiet social transformation in this area. The government has recognized 18 official languages; Hindi, the national language, is the most widely spoken, although English is a national lingua franca. Although 81% of its people are Hindu, India also is the home of more than 138 million Muslims--one of the world's largest Muslim populations. The population also includes Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Parsis.

The Hindu caste system reflects Indian occupational and socially defined hierarchies. Ancient Sanskrit sources divide society into four major categories, priests (*Brahmin*), warriors (*Kshatriya*), traders/artisans (*Vaishya*) and farmers/laborers (*Shudra*). Although these categories are understood throughout India, they describe reality only in the most general terms. They omit, for example, the tribal people and those outside the caste system formerly known as "untouchables", or *dalits*. In reality, Indian society is divided into thousands of *jatis*--local, endogamous groups based on occupation--and organized hierarchically according to complex ideas of purity and pollution. Discrimination based on caste is officially illegal, but remains prevalent, especially in rural areas. Nevertheless, the government has made strong efforts to minimize the importance of caste through active affirmative action and social policies. Moreover, caste is often diluted if not subsumed in the economically prosperous and heterogeneous cities, where an increasing percentage of India's population lives. In the countryside, expanding education, land reform and economic opportunity through access to information, communication, transport, and credit are helping to lessen the harshest elements of the caste system.