

Indian Society and Culture



Social Organization

Major determinants of social and political organization in India today are:
Religion,
Caste, and
Language.

There are more job opportunities in the private sector and better chances of upward social mobility now, hence 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.

About 80% of the population is Hindu; India is the home of more than 138 million Muslims, the third largest Muslim population in the world. India's population also includes Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Parsis.

The Caste System

- The caste system is based on occupational and socially defined hierarchies.
- There are 4 castes:
 - 1) priests (Brahmin),
 - 2) warriors (Kshatriya),
 - 3) traders/artisans (Vaishya), and
 - 4) farmers/laborers (Shudra).
- These categories are generally understood throughout India.
- The caste system does not include 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. Government effort, 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.

The Hindu Worldview

Concept of dharma – following one's duty; being duty bound

Karma – action and consequence (as we sow, so we reap)

Samsara – cycle of life

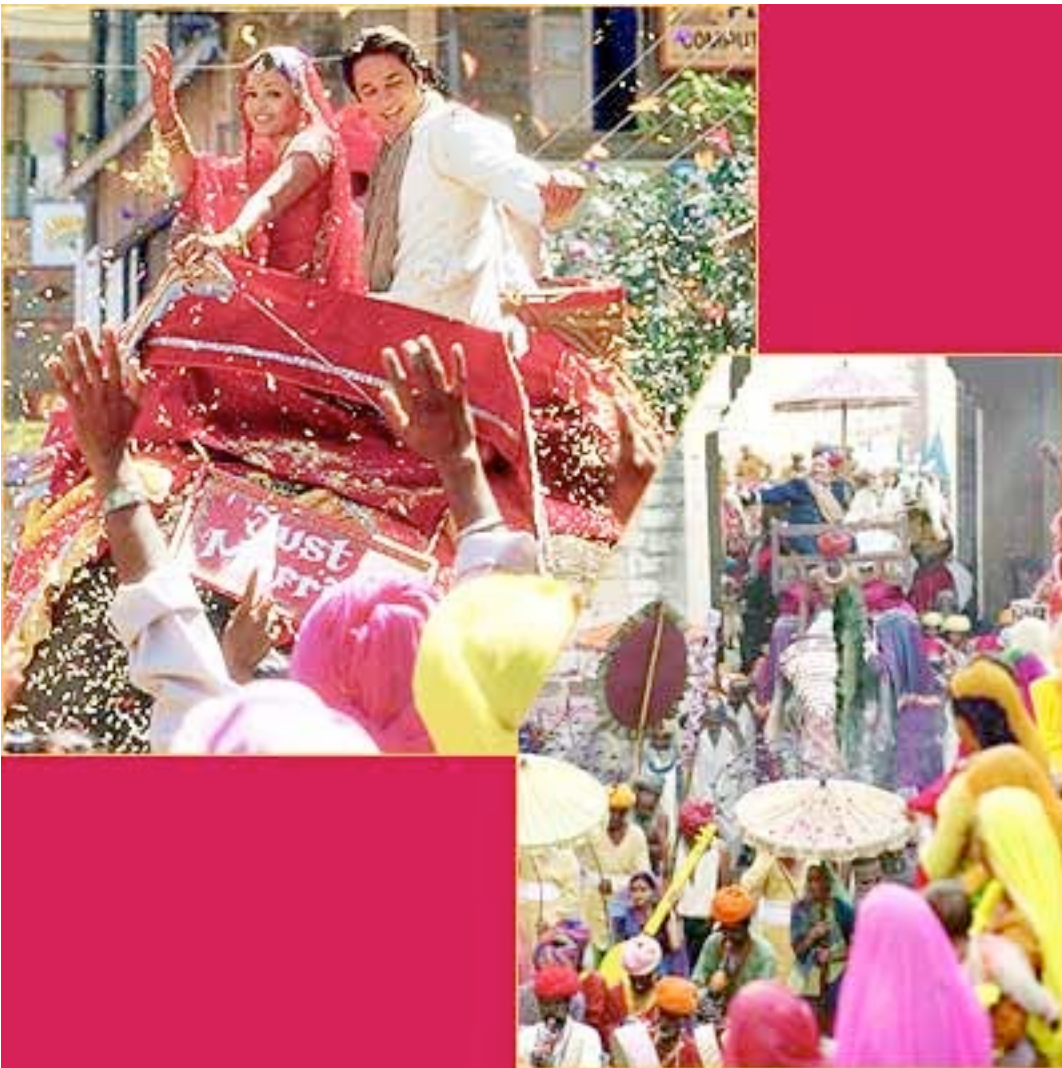
Moksha – release from the successive cycles of life, death and rebirth

Rites of Passage

Life stages/transitions considered most important:

- 1) Birth
- 2) Puberty
- 3) Marriage
- 4) Death

Hindu Weddings



Hindu weddings are a sacrament. Generally, they last a few days. They are highly ritualized. Fire is a sacred and central element of the Hindu wedding. Weddings are very festive, with lots of music, dancing, food, sweets, gifts, and include many family traditions.

Black or plain white is NEVER worn at a wedding as both are the colors of sorrow, mourning or widowhood.

Variations in Hindu Weddings

Not all Hindu weddings are ostentatious, noisy, and long.

Many factors affect wedding customs:

- Region
- Caste
- Socio-economic standing
- Education level
- Urban versus rural
- Family make-up

Education



Post Graduation
1.5 to 3 years

Graduation
Professional 3 years
Medicine 5 years
Commerce 3 years

Higher Secondary
Class: 11-12 Age: 16-17

Secondary
Class: 6-10 Age: 11-5

Primary
Class: 1-5 Age: 6-11

India Higher Education
INDIA UNIVERSITY, INC.

IITs and IIMs

IIT - Indian Institutes of Technology

IIM – Indian Institute of Management

Both are institutes of higher education and of national importance. These institutes are created to develop skilled workforce to support the economic, social & political health of the country .

IIT admission is very competitive since the entrance exam is generally considered tough and also because of the very high number of test takers. In 2011 over 485,000 students competed for 9,618 seats, a ratio of acceptance of less than 1 in 50.

All IIMs offer a two-year full time Post Graduate Programme in Management (PGP). This program is considered the flagship program of IIMs, and awards the Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM) to successful candidates. This diploma is equivalent to the Master of Business Administration postgraduate degree. The Common Admission Test (CAT) is a management aptitude test conducted by the IIMs primarily as an evaluation tool for admission to their two year PGP programs. It is widely considered as one of the most competitive exams in the world, with a success rate of around one in two hundred.

Cricket

- The Indian cricket team is the national cricket team of India.
- The British brought cricket to India in with the first cricket match played in 1721; the first cricket club in India was established in Calcutta in 1792.



- On 2 April 2011, India won the 2011 Cricket World Cup, defeating Sri Lanka in the final, thus becoming the second team after West Indies and Australia to win it twice, the previous win being in 1983.

Field Hockey

India has won eight Olympic gold medals for hockey. Indian hockey's golden period was from 1928–56, when the Indian hockey team won six successive Olympic gold medals. The team also won the 1975 World Cup besides two more medals (silver and a bronze). The Indian Hockey Federation gained global affiliation in 1927 and joined the International Hockey Federation (FIH). Post Indian Independence; the Indian team achieved another hat-trick of gold medals at the 1948 London Olympics, 1952 Helsinki Games and the Melbourne Olympics.



Indian-Hockey-Team-Berlin-1936

Workforce

Labor force: 487.6 million (2011 estimate)

Labor force - by occupation:

agriculture: 52%

industry: 14%

services: 34%

Unemployment rate: 9.8% (2011 estimate)

Classified as a "low income" country by the World Bank with a GNI (gross national income) of \$450.

Great inequality in the distribution of wealth: the richest tenth of households hold 33% of wealth, while the poorest tenth only hold 3%.

29% of the population lives below the poverty line; 70% of these people reside in rural areas; 86% of the population lives under \$2 per day;

44% lives under \$1 per day;

25% of the population does not have enough money to eat adequately.

Do's and Don'ts in India

- 1) Do drink bottled water only.
- 2) Don't offer bribes to get any job done. Bribe-taking and bribe-giving are a common practice in India but they are intended to speed up things or win a favor that non-Indians are not entitled to. Plan well in advance. Use consultants or trade and industry associations. If you expect favors, let them come free or not at all. Warn anyone (even in government) who asks you for a bribe that you would report him to the Anti-Corruption Bureau or the nearest police-station.
- 3) Don't show amusement at Indian English, accents or choice of words. The fact remains that many Indians speak and write better English than many native English speakers.
- 4) Do pay attention to the Indian nod. Many Indians are in the habit of shaking their head in the course of conversation or taking instructions. The nod generally means I hear you. Namaste. This is a greeting done with joining of your palms as during prayer.
- 5) Do say *namaste*, folding your hands together, as if praying. This is a common greeting well understood across India, in spite of linguistic differences.
- 6) Don't shake hands with women if they do not extend their hand out first. Many women may not wish to shake hands when met, so a *namaste* greeting is appropriate, followed with a *Kaise hai?* (How are you? in Hindi.)

Indian Social Customs

- Politics can be freely discussed in India and most people will have an opinion which they will not mind being contradicted. But avoid discussing religion, especially with Muslims who form about 11% of India's population.
- If you are invited home for dinner, carry a box of sweets (mithai) or a chocolate bar for the child(ren.)
- You must bargain with street vendors, but never at stores.
- Always eat with your (right) hand.
- Don't ever complain about the food. Adjust.
- All give and take is done with the right hand.
- If you accidentally bump someone, be sure to apologize. (The Indian gesture of apology in such a situation is to touch that person on the shoulder and then place your hand to your forehead.)

Mind Your Culture

- Exchange of money is always done with the right hand.
- Being the first customer of the day could get you a good bargain since this is considered to set the standard for all business transactions for the day.
- Books (accounts logs) are considered sacred so must never be placed on the floor.
- Business conversations include enquiring about the family.
- Do not sit with your foot (and especially your sandal/shoe) pointing at anyone.
- Dress modestly. Women must dress modestly.
- Remove shoes when entering a home and religious places.
- Telephone calls from India to the US are very inexpensive and accessible.

Hindu Festival - Diwali



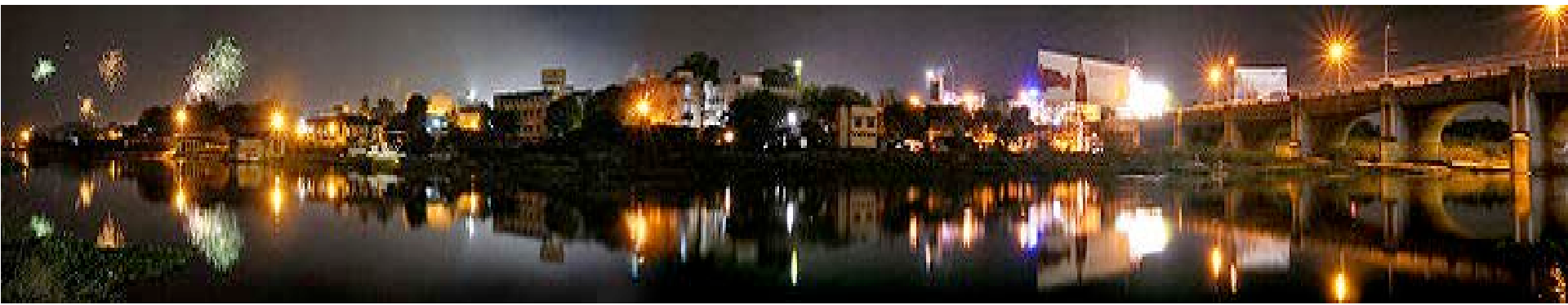
Lanterns

Festival of Lights



Rangoli pattered design at home

Fire crackers



Islamic Festivals of Eid



Eid Al Fitr - Celebration at the end of the holy month of Ramadan

Eid Al Adha - Festival of Sacrifice



Festivals

Buddha Purnima – Buddhist
New Year



Paryushan - Jain festival celebrated for
self-purification and uplift of oneself.

Festivals

Sikh – Baisakhi festival



Nowruz – Parsi New Year celebration

Indian Mythology

Common Ideas in Indian Mythology:

- The Trinity : the Trinity is all powerful; it constitutes of Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma. Lord Vishnu is the preserver of the universe, responsible for the daily running of the universe. Lord Brahma, is the creator of the universe and is responsible for creation of this world and worldly beings. Lord Shiva is considered the destroyer.
- Performing a Penance: deep meditation; requires sacrifice of all pleasures in pursuit of God.
- Granting of a Boon: When gods are pleased with a devotee, they grant a wish to the person, even a limited form of immortality.
- Curse or Shrap: When a God or a rishi (sage) is enraged, he usually casts a curse on the person who causes the rage.
- Relief from Curse: Can occur due to one's karma, in this life or another.
- Deva-Asura war: Common conflict between gods and demons, because asuras (demons) are usually valiant, strong-headed and desire to conquer the territories the devas occupy.

Indian Mythology

There are 2 epic mythologies that shape the culture of India:

Ramayana – the journey of Rama; Rama is the embodiment of a noble person, an ideal son, brother, husband, and king.



Mahabharata – a story about the battle between cousins Pandavas and Kauravas; the Bhagvad Geeta is a part of the Mahabharata, where Arjuna urges Krishna to not falter on the battlefield, but to uphold his duty as a warrior.

Hindu Sacred Texts

The Bhagvad Geeta is the sacred text of the Hindus. It emphasizes the following of one's dharma, one's duty, in life, and not expecting any rewards in return.

The Geeta teaches, **“He who does work for Me, he who looks upon Me as his goal, he who worships Me, free from attachment, who is free from enmity to all creatures, he goes to Me.”**



Krishna and Arjuna at Kurukshetra, 18th–19th century painting

Indian Food

- Wide regional variation
- A variety of spices and nuts add delicate flavor to the food
- Vegetarian food is very common in India
- There are many types of curries (vindaloo, Madras, etc.)
- Do not confuse curry with gravy.
- No beef! (Cows are considered holy in India.)
- Chicken and lamb/mutton are common meats, as is fish.
- Indian pickles are served with every meal; they are made with oil, spices and a variety of vegetables (mango, lemon, chilies, carrots.)
- Plain yogurt is consumed with almost every meal.

Spices



Meal served on a banana leaf



Filter Coffee



Thali dinner with curries and naan



Indian Cinema

The biggest film producing industry in the world is the Mumbai-based Bollywood.

It is also called Hindi Cinema, since many regional language films are also produced in India. Melodrama and romance are common ingredients of Bollywood films.



Indian Music

India has a history of music that spans millennia. Music serves as spiritual inspiration, cultural expression and pure entertainment.

Types of music:

- 1) Folk – rural, ethnic, regional music
- 2) popular – Bollywood and regional cinema music
- 3) classical music – two branches: Carnatic (Southern India) and Hindustani (Northern and Central India)



A pair of Indian folk musicians performing in a rural village



Galaxy of Musicians by Raja Ravi Varma depicts Indian women dressed in regional attire playing a variety of musical instruments popular in different parts of the country.

Indian Dance



Tutsa Dancers from Changlang district in Arunachal Pradesh

In Hindu mythology, dance is believed to have been conceived by Brahma, who inspired the sage Bharata Muni to write the *Natya Shastra*, a treatise on performing arts, from which a codified practice of dance and drama emerged. The best-known of Hindu deities—Shiva, Kali and Krishna—are typically represented dancing. Shiva's cosmic dance, Kali's dance of creation and destruction, and Krishna's dance with the gopikas (cow-herd girls)—Rasa Lila—are popular motifs in Hindu mythology.



Shiva Nataraja, as the lord of dance. His dance symbolizes cosmic energy, flowing from destruction to regeneration.



Kathakali dancer from Kerala

Some of the Indian dances are kathak, kathakali, Kucchipudi, raas-garba, ghummar, bharat-natyam, and many folk, tribal, and regional dances.

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