

Islam.^[46] In south India, the Vijayanagara Empire created a long-lasting composite Hindu culture.^[47] In the Punjab, Sikhism emerged, rejecting institutionalised religion.^[48] The Mughal Empire, in 1526, ushered in two centuries of relative peace,^[49] leaving a legacy of luminous architecture.^[m]^[50] Gradually expanding rule of the British East India Company turned India into a colonial economy but consolidated its sovereignty.^[51] British Crown rule began in 1858. The rights promised to Indians were granted slowly,^[52]^[53] but technological changes were introduced, and modern ideas of education and public life took root.^[54] A pioneering and influential nationalist movement, noted for nonviolent resistance, became the major factor in ending British rule.^[55]^[56] In 1947, the British Indian Empire was partitioned into two independent dominions,^[57]^[58]^[59]^[60] a Hindu-majority dominion of India and a Muslim-majority dominion of Pakistan. A large-scale loss of life and an unprecedented migration accompanied the partition.^[61]

India has been a federal republic since 1950, governed through a democratic parliamentary system. It is a pluralistic, multilingual and multi-ethnic society. India's population grew from 361 million in 1951 to over 1.4 billion in 2023.^[62] During this time, its nominal per capita income increased from US\$64 annually to US\$2,601, and its literacy rate from 16.6% to 74%. A comparatively destitute country in 1951,^[63] India has become a fast-growing major economy and hub for information technology services; it has an expanding middle class.^[64] Indian movies and music increasingly influence global culture.^[65] India has reduced its poverty rate, though at the cost of increasing economic inequality.^[66] It is a nuclear-weapon state that ranks high in military expenditure. It has disputes over Kashmir with its neighbours, Pakistan and China, unresolved since the mid-20th century.^[67] Among the socio-economic challenges India faces are gender inequality, child malnutrition,^[68] and rising levels of air pollution.^[69] India's land is megadiverse with four biodiversity hotspots.^[70] India's wildlife, which has traditionally been viewed with tolerance in its culture,^[71] is supported in protected habitats.

Recognised regional languages	<div>State level and [show]</div> <div>Eighth Schedule^[9]</div> <div>Eighth Schedule</div> <div>Assamese · Bengali · Boro · Dogri · Gujarati · Hindi · Kannada · Kashmiri · Konkani · Maithili · Malayalam · Manipuri · Marathi · Nepali · Odia · Punjabi · Sanskrit · Santali · Sindhi · Tamil · Telugu · Urdu</div> <div>State level^[e]</div> <div>Kokborok · Lepcha · Mizo · Sikkimese · all the 8th scheduled languages – except Sindhi, Kashmiri and Dogri^[f]</div>
Native languages	424 languages ^[g]
Religion (2011) ^[11]	79.8% <u>Hinduism</u> 14.2% <u>Islam</u> 2.3% <u>Christianity</u> 1.7% <u>Sikhism</u> 0.7% <u>Buddhism</u> 0.4% <u>Jainism</u> 0.23% <u>unaffiliated</u> 0.65% <u>other</u>
Demonym(s)	Indian · others
Government	Federal parliamentary republic <div>• PresidentDroupadi Murmu</div> <div>• Prime MinisterNarendra Modi</div>
Legislature	Parliament <div>• Upper houseRajya Sabha</div> <div>• Lower houseLok Sabha</div>
Independence from the United Kingdom	<div>• Dominion15 August 1947</div> <div>• Republic26 January 1950</div>
Area	<div>• Total3,287,263 km² (1,269,219 sq mi)^[2]^[h] (7th)</div> <div>• Water (%)9.6</div>
Population	<div>• 2023 estimate▲ 1,428,627,663^[13] (1st)</div> <div>• 2011 census▲ 1,210,854,977^[14]^[15] (2nd)</div>

Etymology

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2009), the name "India" is derived from the Classical Latin *India*, a reference to South Asia and an uncertain region to its east. In turn "India" derived successively from Hellenistic Greek *India* (Ἰνδία), Ancient Greek *Indos* (Ἰνδός), Old Persian *Hindush* (an eastern province of the Achaemenid Empire), and ultimately its cognate, the Sanskrit *Sindhu*, or 'river'—specifically the Indus River, and by extension its well-settled southern basin.^{[72][73]} The Ancient Greeks referred to the Indians as *Indoi*, 'the people of the Indus'.^[74]

The term *Bharat* (*Bhārat*; pronounced [ˈbʱaːɾət] [ⓘ]), mentioned in both Indian epic poetry and the Constitution of India,^{[75][76]} is used in its variations by many Indian languages. A modern rendering of the historical name *Bharatavarsha*, which applied originally to North India,^{[77][78]} *Bharat* gained increased currency from the mid-19th century as a native name for India.^{[75][79]}

Hindustan ([ɦɪndʊˈstaːn] [ⓘ]) is a Middle Persian name for India that became popular by the 13th century,^[80] and was used widely since the era of the Mughal Empire. The meaning of *Hindustan* has varied, referring to a region encompassing the northern Indian subcontinent (present-day northern India and Pakistan) or to India in its near entirety.^{[75][79][81]}

History

Ancient India

By 55,000 years ago, the first modern humans, or *Homo sapiens*, had arrived on the Indian subcontinent from Africa.^{[28][29][30]} The earliest known modern human remains in South Asia date to about 30,000 years ago.^[28] After 6500 BCE, evidence for domestication of food crops and animals, construction of permanent structures, and storage of agricultural surplus appeared in Mehrgarh and other sites in Balochistan, Pakistan.^[83] These gradually developed into the Indus Valley Civilisation,^{[84][83]} the first urban culture in South Asia,^[85] which flourished during 2500–1900 BCE in Pakistan and western India.^[86] Centred around cities such as Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Dholavira, and Kalibangan, and relying on varied forms of subsistence, the civilisation engaged robustly in crafts production and wide-ranging trade.^[85]

<div> <div><div>•</div>Density</div> <div>429.5/km² (1,112.4/sq mi) (30th)</div> </div>
<div> <div><div>GDP (PPP)</div></div> <div> <div>2025 estimate</div> <div>• Total</div> <div>▲ \$17.65 trillion^{[16][17]} (3rd)</div> <div>• Per capita</div> <div>▲ \$12,132^[16] (119th)</div> </div> </div>
<div> <div><div>GDP (nominal)</div></div> <div> <div>2025 estimate</div> <div>• Total</div> <div>▲ \$4.19 trillion^[16] (4th)</div> <div>• Per capita</div> <div>▲ \$2,878^[16] (136th)</div> </div> </div>
<div> <div><div>Gini (2021)</div></div> <div> <div>▼ 32.8^[18]</div> <div>medium inequality</div> </div> </div>
<div> <div><div>HDI (2023)</div></div> <div> <div>▲ 0.685^[19]</div> <div>medium (130th)</div> </div> </div>
<div> <div><div>Currency</div></div> <div>Indian rupee (₹) (INR)</div> </div>
<div> <div><div>Time zone</div></div> <div>UTC+05:30 (IST)</div> </div>
<div> <div><div>Date format</div></div> <div>dd-mm-yyyy^[1]</div> </div>
<div> <div><div>Calling code</div></div> <div>+91</div> </div>
<div> <div><div>ISO 3166 code</div></div> <div>IN</div> </div>
<div> <div><div>Internet TLD</div></div> <div>.in (others)</div> </div>



Manuscript illustration, c. 1650, of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana, composed in story-telling fashion c. 400 BCE – c. 300 CE^[82]

During the period 2000–500 BCE, many regions of the subcontinent transitioned from the Chalcolithic cultures to the Iron Age ones.^[87] The Vedas, the oldest scriptures associated with Hinduism,^[88] were composed during this period,^[89] and historians have analysed these to posit a Vedic culture in the Punjab region and the upper Gangetic Plain.^[87] Most historians also consider this period to have encompassed several waves of Indo-Aryan migration into the subcontinent from the north-west.^[88] The caste system, which created a hierarchy of priests, warriors, and free peasants, but which excluded indigenous peoples by labelling their occupations impure, arose during this period.^[90] On the Deccan Plateau, archaeological evidence from this period suggests the existence of a chiefdom stage of political organisation.^[87] In South India, a progression to sedentary life is indicated by the large number of megalithic monuments dating from this period,^[91] as well as by nearby traces of agriculture, irrigation tanks, and craft traditions.^[91]

In the late Vedic period, around the 6th century BCE, the small states and chiefdoms of the Ganges Plain and the north-western regions had consolidated into 16 major oligarchies and monarchies that were known as the mahajanapadas.^{[92][93]} The emerging urbanisation gave rise to non-Vedic religious movements, two of which became independent religions. Jainism came into prominence during the life of its exemplar, Mahavira.^[94] Buddhism, based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha, attracted followers from all social classes excepting the middle class; chronicling the life of the Buddha was central to the beginnings of recorded history in India.^{[95][96][97]} In an age of increasing urban wealth, both religions held up renunciation as an ideal,^[98] and both established long-lasting monastic traditions. Politically, by the 3rd century BCE, the kingdom of Magadha had annexed or reduced other states to emerge as the Maurya Empire.^[99] The empire was once thought to have controlled most of the subcontinent except the far south, but its core regions are now thought to have been separated by large autonomous areas.^{[100][101]} The Mauryan kings are known as much for their empire-building and determined management of public life as for Ashoka's renunciation of militarism and far-flung advocacy of the Buddhist dhamma.^{[102][103]}



Cave 26 of the rock-cut Ajanta Caves

The Sangam literature of the Tamil language reveals that, between 200 BCE and 200 CE, the southern peninsula was ruled by the Cheras, the Cholas, and the Pandys, dynasties that traded extensively with the Roman Empire and with West and Southeast Asia.^{[104][105]} In North India, Hinduism asserted patriarchal control within the family, leading to increased subordination of women.^{[106][99]} By the 4th and 5th centuries, the Gupta Empire had created a complex system of administration and taxation in the greater Ganges Plain; this system became a model for later Indian kingdoms.^{[107][108]} Under the Guptas, a renewed Hinduism based on devotion, rather than the management of ritual, began to assert itself.^[109] This renewal was reflected in a flowering of sculpture and architecture, which found patrons among an urban elite.^[108] Classical Sanskrit literature flowered as well, and Indian science, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics made significant advances.^[108]

Medieval India

The Indian early medieval age, from 600 to 1200 CE, is defined by regional kingdoms and cultural diversity.^[110] When Harsha of Kannauj, who ruled much of the Indo-Gangetic Plain from 606 to 647 CE, attempted to expand southwards, he was defeated by the Chalukya ruler of the Deccan.^[111] When his successor attempted to expand eastwards, he was defeated by the Pala king of Bengal.^[111] When the Chalukyas attempted to expand southwards, they were defeated by the Pallavas from farther south, who in turn were opposed by the Pandys and the Cholas from still farther south.^[111] No ruler of this period was



Brihadeshwara temple, Thanjavur, completed in 1010 CE

The Qutub Minar, 73 m (240 ft) tall, completed by the Sultan of Delhi, Iltutmish

able to create an empire and consistently control lands much beyond their core region.^[110] During this time, pastoral peoples, whose land had been cleared to make way for the growing agricultural economy, were accommodated within caste society, as were new non-traditional ruling classes.^[112] The caste system consequently began to show regional differences.^[112]

In the 6th and 7th centuries, the first devotional hymns were created in the Tamil language.^[113] They were imitated all over India and led to both the resurgence of Hinduism and the development of all modern languages of the subcontinent.^[113] Indian royalty, big and small, and the temples they patronised drew citizens in great numbers to the capital cities, which became economic hubs as well.^[114] Temple towns of various sizes began to appear everywhere as India

underwent another urbanisation.^[114] By the 8th and 9th centuries, the effects were felt in Southeast Asia, as South Indian culture and political systems were exported to lands that became part of modern-day Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia.^[115] Indian merchants, scholars, and sometimes armies were involved in this transmission; Southeast Asians took the initiative as well, with many sojourning in Indian seminaries and translating Buddhist and Hindu texts into their languages.^[115]

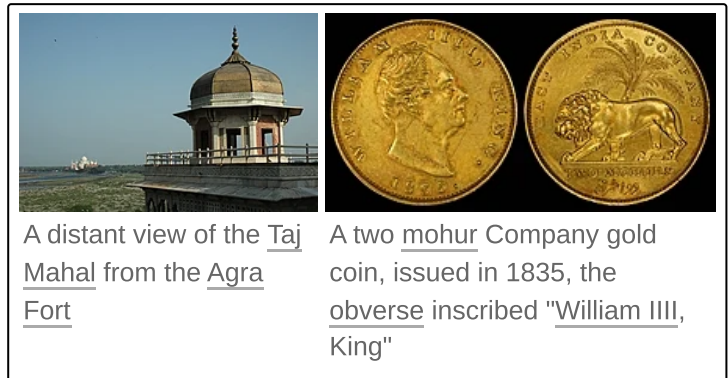
After the 10th century, Muslim Central Asian nomadic clans, using swift-horse cavalry and raising vast armies united by ethnicity and religion, repeatedly overran South Asia's north-western plains, leading eventually to the establishment of the Islamic Delhi Sultanate in 1206.^[116] The sultanate was to control much of North India and to make many forays into South India. Although at first disruptive for the Indian elites, the sultanate largely left its vast non-Muslim subject population to its own laws and customs.^{[117][118]} By repeatedly repulsing Mongol raiders in the 13th century, the sultanate saved India from the devastation visited on West and Central Asia, setting the scene for centuries of migration of fleeing soldiers, learned men, mystics, traders, artists, and artisans from that region into the subcontinent, thereby creating a syncretic Indo-Islamic culture in the north.^{[119][120]} The sultanate's raiding and weakening of the regional kingdoms of South India paved the way for the indigenous Vijayanagara Empire.^[121] Embracing a strong Shaivite tradition and building upon the military technology of the sultanate, the empire came to control much of peninsular India,^[122] and was to influence South Indian society for long afterwards.^[121]

Early modern India

In the early 16th century, northern India, then under mainly Muslim rulers,^[123] fell again to the superior mobility and firepower of a new generation of Central Asian warriors.^[124] The resulting Mughal Empire did not stamp out the local societies it came to rule. Instead, it balanced and pacified them through new administrative practices^{[125][126]} and diverse and inclusive ruling elites,^[127] leading to more systematic, centralised, and uniform rule.^[128] Eschewing tribal bonds and Islamic identity, especially under Akbar, the Mughals united their far-flung realms through loyalty, expressed through a Persianised culture, to an emperor who had near-divine status.^[127] The Mughal state's economic policies, deriving most revenues from agriculture^[129] and mandating that taxes be paid in the well-regulated silver currency,^[130] caused peasants and artisans to enter larger markets.^[128] The relative peace maintained by the empire during much of the 17th century was a factor in India's economic expansion,^[128] resulting in greater patronage of painting,

literary forms, textiles, and architecture.^[131] Newly coherent social groups in northern and western India, such as the Marathas, the Rajputs, and the Sikhs, gained military and governing ambitions during Mughal rule, which, through collaboration or adversity, gave them both recognition and military experience.^[132] Expanding commerce during Mughal rule gave rise to new Indian commercial and political elites along the coasts of southern and eastern India.^[132] As the empire disintegrated, many among these elites were able to seek and control their own affairs.^[133]

By the early 18th century, with the lines between commercial and political dominance being increasingly blurred, a number of European trading companies, including the English East India Company, had established coastal outposts.^{[134][135]} The East India Company's control of the seas, greater resources, and more advanced military training and technology led it to increasingly assert its military strength and caused it to become attractive to a portion of the Indian elite; these factors were crucial in allowing the company to gain control over the Bengal region by 1765 and sideline the other European companies.^{[136][134][137][138]} Its further access to the riches of Bengal and the subsequent increased strength and size of its army enabled it to annex or subdue most of India by the 1820s.^[139] India was then no longer exporting manufactured goods as it long had, but was instead supplying the British Empire with raw materials. Many historians consider this to be the onset of India's colonial period.^[134] By this time, with its economic power severely curtailed by the British parliament and having effectively been made an arm of British administration, the East India Company began more consciously to enter non-economic arenas, including education, social reform, and culture.^[140]



A distant view of the Taj Mahal from the Agra Fort

A two mohur Company gold coin, issued in 1835, the obverse inscribed "William III, King"

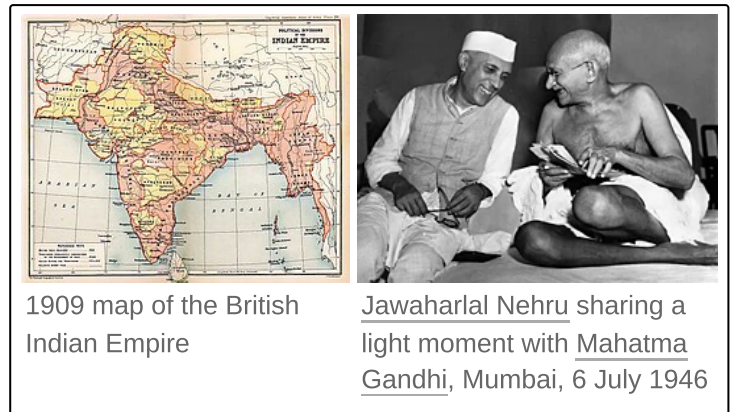
Modern India

Historians consider India's modern age to have begun sometime between 1848 and 1885. The appointment in 1848 of Lord Dalhousie as Governor General of the East India Company set the stage for changes essential to a modern state. These included the consolidation and demarcation of sovereignty, the surveillance of the population, and the education of citizens. Technological changes—among them, railways, canals, and the telegraph—were introduced not long after their introduction in Europe.^{[141][142][143][144]} However, disaffection with the company also grew during this time and set off the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Fed by diverse resentments and perceptions, including invasive British-style social reforms, harsh land taxes, and summary treatment of some rich landowners and princes, the rebellion rocked many regions of northern and central India and shook the foundations of Company rule.^{[145][146]} Although the rebellion was suppressed by 1858, it led to the dissolution of the East India Company and the direct administration of India by the British government. Proclaiming a unitary state and a gradual but limited British-style parliamentary system, the new rulers also protected princes and landed gentry as a feudal safeguard against future unrest.^{[147][148]} In the decades following, public life gradually emerged all over India, leading eventually to the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885.^{[149][150][151][152]}

The rush of technology and the commercialisation of agriculture in the second half of the 19th century was marked by economic setbacks, and many small farmers became dependent on the whims of far-away markets.^[153] There was an increase in the number of large-scale famines,^[154] and, despite the risks of infrastructure development borne by Indian taxpayers, little industrial employment was generated for

Indians.^[155] There were also salutary effects: commercial cropping, especially in the newly canalled Punjab, led to increased food production for internal consumption.^[156] The railway network provided critical famine relief,^[157] notably reduced the cost of moving goods,^[157] and helped nascent Indian-owned industry.^[156]

After World War I, in which approximately one million Indians served,^[158] a new period began. It was marked by British reforms but also repressive legislation, by more strident Indian calls for self-rule, and by the beginnings of a nonviolent movement of non-co-operation, of which Mahatma Gandhi would become the leader and enduring symbol.^[159] During the 1930s, slow legislative reform was enacted by the British; the Indian National Congress won victories in the resulting elections.^[160] The next decade was beset with crises: Indian participation in World War II, the Congress's final push for non-co-operation, and an upsurge of Muslim nationalism. All were capped by the advent of independence in 1947, but tempered by the partition of India into two states: India and Pakistan.^[161]



Vital to India's self-image as an independent nation was its constitution, completed in 1950, which put in place a secular and democratic republic.^[162] Economic liberalisation, which began in the 1980s and the collaboration with Soviet Union for technical know-how,^[163] has created a large urban middle class, transformed India into one of the world's fastest-growing economies,^[164] and increased its geopolitical clout. Yet, India is also shaped by seemingly unyielding poverty, both rural and urban;^[165] by religious and caste-related violence,^[166] by Maoist-inspired Naxalite insurgencies,^[167] and by separatism in Jammu and Kashmir and in Northeast India.^[168] It has unresolved territorial disputes with China^[169] and with Pakistan.^[169] India's sustained democratic freedoms are unique among the world's newer nations; however, in spite of its recent economic successes, freedom from want for its disadvantaged population remains a goal yet to be achieved.^[170]

Geography

India accounts for the bulk of the Indian subcontinent, lying atop the Indian tectonic plate, a part of the Indo-Australian Plate.^[171] India's defining geological processes began 75 million years ago when the Indian Plate, then part of the southern supercontinent Gondwana, began a north-eastward drift caused by seafloor spreading to its south-west, and later, south and south-east.^[171] Simultaneously, the vast Tethyan oceanic crust, to its northeast, began to subduct under the Eurasian Plate.^[171] These dual processes, driven by convection in the Earth's mantle, both created the Indian Ocean and caused the Indian continental crust eventually to under-thrust Eurasia and to uplift the Himalayas.^[171] Immediately south of the emerging Himalayas, plate movement created a vast crescent-shaped trough that rapidly filled with river-borne sediment^[172] and now constitutes the Indo-Gangetic Plain.^[173] The original Indian plate makes its first appearance above the sediment in the ancient Aravalli range, which extends from the Delhi Ridge in a southwesterly direction. To the west lies the Thar Desert, the eastern spread of which is checked by the Aravallis.^{[174][175][176]}

The remaining Indian Plate survives as peninsular India, the oldest and geologically most stable part of India. It extends as far north as the Satpura and Vindhya ranges in central India. These parallel chains run from the Arabian Sea coast in Gujarat in the west to the coal-rich Chota Nagpur Plateau in Jharkhand in the



The Tungabhadra, with rocky outcrops, flows into the peninsular Krishna River.^[177]



Fishing boats lashed together in a tidal creek in Anjarle village, Maharashtra

east.^[178] To the south, the remaining peninsular landmass, the Deccan Plateau, is flanked on the west and east by coastal ranges known as the Western and Eastern Ghats;^[179] the plateau contains the country's oldest rock formations, some over one billion years old. Constituted in such fashion, India lies to the north of the equator between 6° 44' and 35° 30' north latitude^[n] and 68° 7' and 97° 25' east longitude.^[180]

India's coastline measures 7,517 kilometres (4,700 mi) in length; of this distance, 5,423 kilometres (3,400 mi) belong to peninsular India and 2,094 kilometres (1,300 mi) to the Andaman, Nicobar, and Lakshadweep island chains.^[181] According to the Indian naval hydrographic charts, the mainland coastline consists of the following: 43% sandy beaches; 11% rocky shores, including cliffs; and 46% mudflats or marshy shores.^[181]

Major Himalayan-origin rivers that substantially flow through India include the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, both of which drain into the Bay of Bengal.^[182] Important tributaries of the Ganges include the Yamuna and the Kosi; the latter's extremely low gradient, caused by long-term silt deposition, leads to severe floods and course

changes.^{[183][184]} Major peninsular rivers, whose steeper gradients prevent their waters from flooding, include the Godavari, the Mahanadi, the Kaveri, and the Krishna, which also drain into the Bay of Bengal;^[185] and the Narmada and the Tapti, which drain into the Arabian Sea.^[186] Coastal features include the marshy Rann of Kutch of western India and the alluvial Sundarbans delta of eastern India; the latter is shared with Bangladesh.^[187] India has two archipelagos: the Lakshadweep, coral atolls off India's south-western coast; and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a volcanic chain in the Andaman Sea.^[188]

Indian climate is strongly influenced by the Himalayas and the Thar Desert, both of which drive the economically and culturally pivotal summer and winter monsoons.^[189] The Himalayas prevent cold Central Asian katabatic winds from blowing in, keeping the bulk of the Indian subcontinent warmer than most locations at similar latitudes.^{[190][191]} The Thar Desert plays a crucial role in attracting the moisture-laden south-west summer monsoon winds that, between June and October, provide the majority of India's rainfall.^[189] Four major climatic groupings predominate in India: tropical wet, tropical dry, subtropical humid, and montane.^[192]

Temperatures in India have risen by 0.7 °C (1.3 °F) between 1901 and 2018.^[193] Climate change in India is often thought to be the cause. The retreat of Himalayan glaciers has adversely affected the flow rate of the major Himalayan rivers, including the Ganges and the Brahmaputra.^[194] According to some current projections, the number and severity of droughts in India will have markedly increased by the end of the present century.^[195]

Biodiversity

India is a megadiverse country, a term employed for 17 countries that display high biological diversity and contain many species exclusively indigenous, or endemic, to them.^[196] India is the habitat for 8.6% of all mammals, 13.7% of bird species, 7.9% of reptile species, 6% of amphibian species, 12.2% of fish species,

and 6.0% of all flowering plant species.^{[197][198]} Fully a third of Indian plant species are endemic.^[199] India also contains four of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots,^[70] or regions that display significant habitat loss in the presence of high endemism.^{[o][200]}

India's most dense forests, such as the tropical moist forest of the Andaman Islands, the Western Ghats, and Northeast India, occupy approximately 3% of its land area.^{[201][202]} *Moderately dense forest*, whose canopy density is between 40% and 70%, occupies 9.39% of India's land area.^{[201][202]} It predominates in the temperate coniferous forest of the Himalayas, the moist deciduous sal forest of eastern India, and the dry deciduous teak forest of central and southern India.^[203] India has two natural zones of thorn forest, one in the Deccan Plateau, immediately east of the Western Ghats, and the other in the western part of the Indo-Gangetic plain, now turned into rich agricultural land by irrigation, its features no longer visible.^[204]

Among the Indian subcontinent's notable indigenous trees are the astringent *Azadirachta indica*, or *neem*, which is widely used in rural Indian herbal medicine,^[205] and the luxuriant *Ficus religiosa*, or *peepul*,^[206] which is displayed on the ancient seals of Mohenjo-daro,^[207] and under which the Buddha is recorded in the Pali canon to have sought enlightenment.^[208]

Many Indian species have descended from those of Gondwana, the southern supercontinent from which India separated more than 100 million years ago.^[209] India's subsequent collision with Eurasia set off a mass exchange of species. However, volcanism and climatic changes later caused the extinction of many endemic Indian forms.^[210] Still later, mammals entered India from Asia through two zoogeographic passes flanking the Himalayas.^[211] This had the effect of lowering endemism among India's mammals, which stands at 12.6%, contrasting with 45.8% among reptiles and 55.8% among amphibians.^[198] Among endemics are the vulnerable^[212] hooded leaf monkey^[213] and the threatened Beddome's toad^{[214][215]} of the Western Ghats.

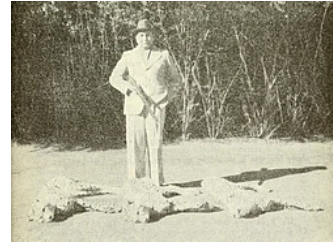
India contains 172 IUCN-designated threatened animal species, or 2.9% of endangered forms.^[216] These include the endangered Bengal tiger and the Ganges river dolphin. Critically endangered species include the gharial, a crocodilian; the great Indian bustard; and the Indian white-rumped vulture, which has become nearly extinct by having ingested the carrion of diclofenac-treated cattle.^[217] Before they were extensively used for agriculture and cleared for human settlement, the thorn forests of Punjab were mingled at intervals with open grasslands that were grazed by large herds of blackbuck preyed on by the Asiatic cheetah; the blackbuck, no longer extant in Punjab, is now severely endangered in India, and the cheetah is extinct.^[218] The pervasive and ecologically devastating human encroachment of recent decades has critically endangered Indian wildlife. In response, the system of national parks and protected areas, first established in 1935, was expanded substantially. In 1972, India enacted the Wildlife Protection Act^[219] and Project Tiger to safeguard crucial wilderness; the Forest Conservation Act was enacted in 1980 and amendments added in 1988.^[220] India hosts more than five hundred wildlife sanctuaries and eighteen biosphere reserves,^[221] four of which are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves; its eighty-nine wetlands are registered under the Ramsar Convention.^[222]



India has the majority of the world's wild tigers, approximately 3,170 in 2022.^[223]



A chital (*Axis axis*) stag in the Nagarhole National Park in a region covered by a moderately dense^[p] forest.



Three of the last Asiatic cheetahs in India were shot dead in 1948 in Surguja district, Madhya Pradesh, Central India by Maharajah Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo. The young male cheetahs, all from the same litter, were sitting together when they were shot at night.

Politics and government

Politics

A parliamentary republic with a multi-party system,^[225] India has six recognised national parties, including the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and more than 50 regional parties.^[226] The Congress is considered center in Indian political culture,^[227] and the BJP right-wing.^{[228][229][230]} For most of the period between 1950—when India first became a republic—and the late 1980s, the Congress held a majority in the Parliament. Since then, however, it has increasingly shared the political stage with the BJP,^[231] as well as with powerful regional parties which have often forced the creation of multi-party coalition governments at the center.^[232]



As part of Janadesh 2007, 25,000 pro-land reform landless people in Madhya Pradesh listen to Rajagopal P. V.^[224]

In the Republic of India's first three general elections, in 1951, 1957, and 1962, the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru-led Congress won easy victories. On Nehru's death in 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri briefly became prime minister; he was succeeded, after his own unexpected death in 1966, by Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, who went on to lead the Congress to election victories in 1967 and 1971. Following public discontent with the state of emergency she declared in 1975, the Congress was voted out of power in 1977; the then-new Janata Party, which had opposed the emergency, was voted in. Its government lasted just over two years. There were two prime ministers during this period; Morarji Desai and Charan Singh. Voted back into power in 1980, the Congress saw a change in leadership in 1984, when Indira Gandhi was assassinated; she was succeeded by her son Rajiv Gandhi, who won an easy victory in the general elections later that year. The Congress was voted out again in 1989 when a National Front coalition, led by the newly formed Janata Dal in alliance with the Left Front, won the elections; that government too proved relatively short-lived, lasting just under two years. There were two prime ministers during this period; V.P.

Singh and Chandra Shekhar.^[233] Elections were held again in 1991; no party won an absolute majority. The Congress, as the largest single party, was able to form a minority government led by P. V. Narasimha Rao.^[234]



US president Barack Obama addresses the members of the Parliament of India in New Delhi in November 2010.

A two-year period of political turmoil followed the general election of 1996. Several short-lived alliances shared power at the centre. The BJP formed a government briefly in 1996; it was followed by two comparatively long-lasting United Front coalitions, which depended on external support. There were two prime ministers during this period; H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral. In 1998, the BJP was able to form a successful coalition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the NDA became the first non-Congress, coalition government to complete a five-year term.^[235] Again in the 2004 Indian general elections, no party won an absolute majority, but the Congress emerged as the largest single party, forming another successful coalition: the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). It had the support of left-leaning parties and MPs who opposed the BJP.

The UPA returned to power in the 2009 general election with increased numbers, and it no longer required external support from India's communist parties.^[236] That year, Manmohan Singh became the first prime minister since Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957 and 1962 to be re-elected to a consecutive five-year term.^[237] In the 2014 general election, the BJP became the first political party since 1984 to win a majority and govern without the support of other parties.^[238] In the 2019 general election, the BJP was victorious again with majority. In the 2024 general election, the BJP failed to achieve majority and the BJP-led NDA coalition formed the government. Narendra Modi, a former chief minister of Gujarat, is serving as the prime minister of India in his third term since May 26, 2014.^[239]

Government

India is a federation with a parliamentary system governed under the Constitution of India—the country's supreme legal document. It is a constitutional republic. Federalism in India defines the power distribution between the union and the states. The Constitution of India, which came into effect on 26 January 1950,^[241] originally stated India to be a "democratic republic;" this characterisation was amended in 1971 to a "socialist, secular, democratic republic".^[242] India's form of government, traditionally described as "quasi-federal" with a strong centre and weak states,^[243] has grown increasingly federal since the late 1990s as a result of political, economic, and social changes.^{[244][245]}

The Government of India comprises three branches: the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary.^[246] The President of India is the ceremonial head of state,^[247] who is elected indirectly for a five-year term by an electoral college comprising members of national and state legislatures.^{[248][249]} The Prime Minister of India is the head of government and exercises most executive power.^[250] Appointed by the president,^[251] the prime minister is by convention supported by the party or political alliance having a majority of seats in the lower house of parliament.^[250] The executive of the Indian government consists of the president, the vice-president, and the Union Council of Ministers—with the cabinet being its executive committee—headed by the prime minister. Any minister holding a portfolio must



Rashtrapati Bhavan, the official residence of the President of India, was designed by British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker for the Viceroy of India, and constructed between 1911 and 1931 during the British Raj.^[240]

be a member of one of the houses of parliament.^[247] In the Indian parliamentary system, the executive is subordinate to the legislature; the prime minister and their council are directly responsible to the lower house of the parliament. Civil servants act as permanent executives and all decisions of the executive are implemented by them.^[252]

The legislature of India is the bicameral parliament. Operating under a Westminster-style parliamentary system, it comprises an upper house called the Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and a lower house called the Lok Sabha (House of the People).^[253] The Rajya Sabha is a permanent body of 245 members who serve staggered six-year terms with elections every 2 years.^[254] Most are elected indirectly by the state and union territorial legislatures in numbers proportional to their state's share of the national population.^[251] The Lok Sabha's 543 members are elected directly by popular vote among citizens aged at least 18;^[255] they represent single-member constituencies for five-year terms.^[256] The Indian constitution historically allowed for the nomination of Anglo-Indians to two seats in the Lok Sabha; this provision was removed in 2019.^{[255][257]} A number of seats from each state are reserved for candidates from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population within that state.^[255]

India has a three-tier unitary independent judiciary^[258] comprising the supreme court, headed by the Chief Justice of India, 25 high courts, and a large number of trial courts.^[258] The supreme court has original jurisdiction over cases involving fundamental rights and over disputes between states and the centre and has appellate jurisdiction over the high courts.^[259] It has the power to both strike down union or state laws which contravene the constitution^[260] and invalidate any government action it deems unconstitutional.^[261]

Administrative divisions

India is a federal union comprising 28 states and 8 union territories.^[12] All states, as well as the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, Puducherry and the National Capital Territory of Delhi, have elected legislatures and governments following the Westminster system. The remaining five union territories are directly ruled by the central government through appointed administrators. In 1956, under the States Reorganisation Act, states were reorganised on a linguistic basis.^[262] There are over a quarter of a million local government bodies at city, town, block, district and village levels.^[263]

States

1. Andhra Pradesh
2. Arunachal Pradesh
3. Assam
4. Bihar
5. Chhattisgarh
6. Goa
7. Gujarat
8. Haryana
9. Himachal Pradesh
10. Jharkhand



A clickable map of the 28 states and 8 union territories of India

11. [Karnataka](#)12. [Kerala](#)13. [Madhya Pradesh](#)14. [Maharashtra](#)15. [Manipur](#)16. [Meghalaya](#)17. [Mizoram](#)18. [Nagaland](#)19. [Odisha](#)20. [Punjab](#)21. [Rajasthan](#)22. [Sikkim](#)23. [Tamil Nadu](#)24. [Telangana](#)25. [Tripura](#)26. [Uttar Pradesh](#)27. [Uttarakhand](#)28. [West Bengal](#)

Union territories

A. [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#)B. [Chandigarh](#)C. [Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu](#)D. [Jammu and Kashmir](#)E. [Ladakh](#)F. [Lakshadweep](#)G. [National Capital Territory of Delhi](#)H. [Puducherry](#)

Foreign, economic, and strategic relations

India became a republic in 1950 and chose to stay in the Commonwealth of Nations.^{[265][266]} Throughout the decade, India strongly supported [decolonisation](#) in [Africa](#) and [Asia](#) and played a [leading role](#) in the [Non-Aligned Movement](#).^[267] After initially cordial relations with neighbouring China, India went to war with China in 1962 and was widely thought to have been humiliated.^[268] This was followed by another [military conflict](#) in 1967 in which India successfully repelled Chinese attack.^[269] India has had [tense relations](#) with neighbouring Pakistan. The two have gone to war four times: in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999. Three of these wars were fought over the [disputed territory of Kashmir](#), while the third, the 1971 war, followed from India's support for the [independence of Bangladesh](#).^[270] In the late 1980s, the Indian military twice intervened abroad at the invitation of the host country: a [peace-keeping operation](#) in [Sri Lanka](#) between 1987 and 1990; and an armed intervention to prevent a [1988 coup d'état attempt](#) in the [Maldives](#). After the 1965 war with Pakistan, India began to pursue close military and economic [ties with the Soviet Union](#); by the late 1960s, the Soviet Union was its largest arms supplier.^[271]



During the 1950s and 60s, India played a pivotal role in the [Non-Aligned Movement](#).^[264] From left to right: [Gamal Abdel Nasser](#) of [United Arab Republic \(now Egypt\)](#), [Josip Broz Tito](#) of [Yugoslavia](#) and [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) in Belgrade, September 1961.

Aside from its ongoing [special relationship with Russia](#),^[272] India has wide-ranging [defence relations](#) with [Israel](#) and [France](#). In recent years, it has played key roles in the [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation](#) and the [World Trade Organization](#). The nation has provided 100,000 military and police personnel to serve in 35 [UN peacekeeping operations](#) across four continents. It participates in the [East Asia Summit](#), the [G8+5](#), and other multilateral forums.^[273] India has close economic ties with countries in [South America](#),^[274] [Asia](#), and [Africa](#); it pursues a "[Look East](#)" [policy](#) that seeks to strengthen partnerships with the [ASEAN](#) nations, [Japan](#), and [South Korea](#) that revolve around many issues, but especially those involving economic investment and regional security.^{[275][276]}



The Indian Air Force contingent marching at the 221st Bastille Day military parade in Paris, on 14 July 2009. The parade at which India was the foreign guest was led by India's oldest regiment, the Maratha Light Infantry, founded in 1768.^[277]

China's nuclear test of 1964, as well as its repeated threats to intervene in support of Pakistan in the 1965 war, convinced India to develop nuclear weapons.^[278] India conducted its first nuclear weapons test in 1974 and carried out additional underground testing in 1998. Despite criticism and military sanctions, India has signed neither the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty nor the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, considering both to be flawed and discriminatory.^[279] India maintains a "no first use" nuclear policy and is developing a nuclear triad capability as a part of its "Minimum Credible Deterrence" doctrine.^{[280][281]} It is developing a ballistic missile defence shield and, a fifth-generation fighter jet.^{[282][283]} Other indigenous military projects involve the design and implementation of Vikrant-class aircraft carriers and Arihant-class nuclear submarines.^[284]

India is estimated to possess up to 172 nuclear warheads, and is considered to be producing both highly enriched uranium (HEU) and weapons-grade plutonium, with its HEU production assumed to be focused on its growing number of nuclear-powered vessels' and submarines' fuels.^{[285][286]} Kristensen *et al.* of Nuclear Information Project with the Federation of American Scientists estimate that India is operating eight nuclear-capable systems as of 2024, including aircraft, land-based and sea-based ballistic missile systems, with most of its programs in development thought to be nearing "completion and to be fielded with the armed forces soon".^[285]

Since the end of the Cold War, India has increased its economic, strategic, and military co-operation with the United States and the European Union.^[287] In 2008, a civilian nuclear agreement was signed between India and the United States. Although India possessed nuclear weapons at the time and was not a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it received waivers from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Suppliers Group, ending earlier restrictions on India's nuclear technology and commerce. As a consequence, India became the sixth de facto nuclear weapons state.^[288] India subsequently signed co-operation agreements involving civilian nuclear energy with Russia,^[289] France,^[290] the United Kingdom,^[291] and Canada.^[292]

The President of India is the supreme commander of the nation's armed forces; with 1.45 million active troops, they compose the world's second-largest military. It comprises the Indian Army, the Indian Navy, the Indian Air Force, and the Indian Coast Guard.^[293] The official Indian defence budget for 2011 was US\$36.03 billion, or 1.83% of GDP.^[294] Defence expenditure was pegged at US\$70.12 billion for fiscal year 2022–23 and, increased 9.8% than previous fiscal year.^{[295][296]} India is the world's second-largest arms importer; between 2016 and 2020, it accounted for 9.5% of the total global arms imports.^[297] Much of the military expenditure was focused on defence against Pakistan and countering growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.^[298] In May 2017, the Indian Space Research Organisation launched the South Asia Satellite, a gift from India to its neighbouring SAARC countries.^[299] In October 2018, India signed a US\$5.43 billion (over ₹400 billion) agreement with Russia to procure four S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile defence systems, Russia's most advanced long-range missile defence system.^[300]



Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India (left, background) in talks with President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico during a visit to Mexico, 2016

Economy

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Indian economy in 2024 was nominally worth \$3.94 trillion; it was the fifth-largest economy by market exchange rates and is, at around \$15.0 trillion, the third-largest by purchasing power parity (PPP).^[17] With its average annual GDP growth rate of 5.8% over the past two decades, and reaching 6.1% during 2011–2012,^[304] India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies.^[305] However, due to its low GDP per capita—which ranks 136th in the world in nominal per capita income and 125th in per capita income adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP)—the vast majority of Indians fall into the low-income group.^{[306][307]} Until 1991, all Indian governments followed protectionist policies that were influenced by socialist economics. Widespread state intervention and regulation largely walled the economy off from the outside world. An acute balance of payments crisis in 1991 forced the nation to liberalise its economy.^[308] since then, it has moved increasingly towards a free-market system^{[309][310]} by emphasising both foreign trade and direct investment inflows.^[311] India has been a member of World Trade Organization since 1 January 1995.^[312]

The 522-million-worker Indian labour force is the world's second largest, as of 2017.^[293] The service sector makes up 55.6% of GDP, the industrial sector 26.3% and the agricultural sector 18.1%. India's foreign exchange remittances of US\$100 billion in 2022,^[313] highest in the world, were contributed to its economy by 32 million Indians working in foreign countries.^[314] Major agricultural products include rice, wheat, oilseed, cotton, jute, tea, sugarcane, and potatoes.^[12] Major industries include textiles, telecommunications, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, food processing, steel, transport equipment, cement, mining, petroleum, machinery, and software.^[12] In 2006, the share of external trade in India's GDP stood at 24%, up from 6% in 1985.^[309] In 2008, India's share of world trade was 1.7%;^[315] In 2021, India was the world's ninth-largest importer and the sixteenth-largest exporter.^[316] Major exports include petroleum products, textile goods, jewellery, software, engineering goods, chemicals, and manufactured leather goods.^[12] Major imports include crude oil, machinery, gems, fertiliser, and chemicals.^[12] Between 2001 and 2011, the contribution of petrochemical and engineering goods to total exports grew from 14% to 42%.^[317] India was the world's second-largest textile exporter after China in the 2013 calendar year.^[318]

Averaging an economic growth rate of 7.5% for several years prior to 2007,^[309] India has more than doubled its hourly wage rates during the first decade of the 21st century.^[319] Some 431 million Indians have left poverty since 1985; India's middle classes are projected to number around 580 million by 2030.^[320] Though ranking 68th in global competitiveness,^[321] as of 2010, India ranks 17th in financial market sophistication, 24th in the banking sector, 44th in business sophistication, and 39th in innovation, ahead of several advanced



A farmer in northwestern Karnataka ploughs his field with a tractor even as another in a field beyond does the same with a pair of oxen. In 2019, 43% of India's total workforce was employed in agriculture.^[301]



India is the world's largest producer of milk, with the largest population of cattle. In 2018, nearly 80% of India's milk was sourced from small farms with herd size between one and two, the milk harvested by hand milking.^[303]



Women tend to a recently planted rice field in Junagadh district in Gujarat. 55% of India's female workforce was employed in agriculture in 2019.^[302]

economies.^[322] With seven of the world's top 15 information technology outsourcing companies based in India, as of 2009, the country is viewed as the second-most favourable outsourcing destination after the United States.^[323] India is ranked 39th in the Global Innovation Index in 2024.^[324] In 2023, India's consumer market was the world's fifth largest.^[325]

Driven by growth, India's nominal GDP per capita increased steadily from US\$308 in 1991, when economic liberalisation began, to US\$1,380 in 2010, to an estimated US\$2,731 in 2024. It is expected to grow to US\$3,264 by 2026.^[17] However, it has remained lower than those of other Asian developing countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and is expected to remain so in the near future.



A panorama of Bengaluru, the centre of India's software development economy. In the 1980s, when the first multinational corporations began to set up centres in India, they chose Bengaluru (then called Bangalore) because of the large pool of skilled graduates in the area, in turn due to the many science and engineering colleges in the surrounding region.^[326]

According to a 2011 PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report, India's GDP at purchasing power parity could overtake that of the United States by 2045.^[327] During the next four decades, Indian GDP is expected to grow at an annualised average of 8%, making it potentially the world's fastest-growing

major economy until 2050.^[327] The report highlights key growth factors: a young and rapidly growing working-age population; growth in the manufacturing sector because of rising education and engineering skill levels; and sustained growth of the consumer market driven by a rapidly growing middle-class.^[327] The World Bank cautions that, for India to achieve its economic potential, it must continue to focus on public sector reform, transport infrastructure, agricultural and rural development, education, energy security, and public health and nutrition.^[328]

According to the Worldwide Cost of Living Report released by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in 2017, which compared more than 400 individual prices across 160 products and services, four of the cheapest cities were in India: Bengaluru (3rd), Mumbai (5th), Chennai (5th) and New Delhi (8th).^[329]

Industries

India's telecommunication industry is the second-largest in the world with over 1.2 billion subscribers. It contributes 6.5% to India's GDP.^[330] After the third quarter of 2017, India surpassed the US to become the second-largest smartphone market in the world after China.^[331]

The Indian automotive industry, the world's second-fastest growing, increased domestic sales by 26% during 2009–2010,^[332] and exports by 36% during 2008–2009.^[333] In 2022, India became the world's third-largest vehicle market after China and the United States, surpassing Japan.^[334] At the end of 2011, the Indian IT industry employed 2.8 million professionals, generated revenues close to US\$100 billion equalling 7.5% of Indian GDP, and contributed 26% of India's merchandise exports.^[335]



A tea garden in Sikkim. India, the world's second-largest producer of tea, is a nation of one billion tea drinkers, who consume 70% of India's tea output.

The pharmaceutical industry in India emerged as a global player. As of 2021, with 3000 pharmaceutical companies and 10,500 manufacturing units, India is the world's third-largest pharmaceutical producer, largest producer of generic medicines and supply up to 50–60% of global vaccines demand, these all contribute up to US\$24.44 billions in exports and India's local pharmaceutical market is estimated up to US\$42 billion.^{[336][337]} India is among the top 12 biotech destinations in the world.^{[338][339]} The Indian biotech industry grew by 15.1% in 2012–2013, increasing its revenues from ₹204.4 billion (Indian rupees) to ₹235.24 billion (US\$3.94 billion at June 2013 exchange rates).^[340]

Energy

India's capacity to generate electrical power is 300 gigawatts, of which 42 gigawatts is renewable.^[341] The country's usage of coal is a major cause of greenhouse gas emissions by India but its renewable energy is competing strongly.^[342] India emits about 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions. This equates to about 2.5 tons of carbon dioxide per person per year, which is half the world average.^{[343][344]} Increasing access to electricity and clean cooking with liquefied petroleum gas have been priorities for energy in India.^[345]

Socio-economic challenges

Despite economic growth during recent decades, India continues to face socio-economic challenges. In 2006, India contained the largest number of people living below the World Bank's international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day.^[347] The proportion decreased from 60% in 1981 to 42% in 2005.^[348] Under the World Bank's later revised poverty line, it was 21% in 2011.^{[q][350]} 30.7% of India's children under the age of five are underweight.^[351] According to a Food and Agriculture Organization report in 2015, 15% of the population is undernourished.^{[352][353]} The Midday Meal Scheme attempts to lower these rates.^[354]

A 2018 Walk Free Foundation report estimated that nearly 8 million people in India were living in different forms of modern slavery, such as bonded labour, child labour, human trafficking, and forced begging.^[355] According to the 2011 census, there were 10.1 million child labourers in the country, a decline of 2.6 million from 12.6 million in 2001.^[356]

Since 1991, economic inequality between India's states has consistently grown: the per-capita net state domestic product of the richest states in 2007 was 3.2 times that of the poorest.^[357] Corruption in India is perceived to have decreased. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, India ranked 78th out of 180 countries in 2018, an improvement from 85th in 2014.^{[358][359]}



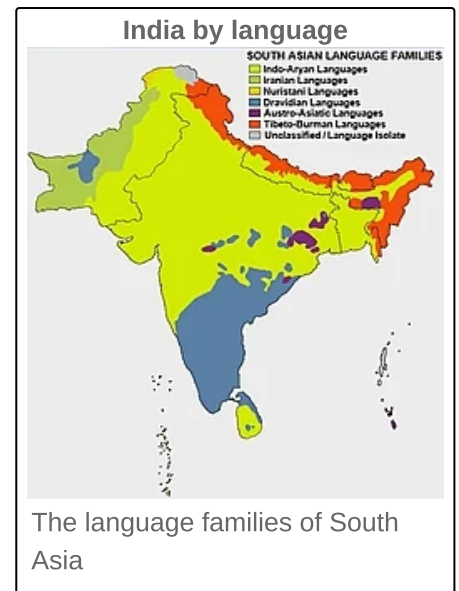
Health workers about to begin another day of immunisation against infectious diseases in 2006. Eight years later, and three years after India's last case of polio, the World Health Organization declared India to be polio-free.^[346]

Demographics, languages, and religion

With an estimated 1,428,627,663 residents in 2023, India is the world's most populous country.^[13] 1,210,193,422 residents were reported in the 2011 provisional census report.^[360] Its population grew by 17.64% from 2001 to 2011,^[361] compared to 21.54% growth in the previous decade (1991–2001).^[361] The human sex ratio, according to the 2011 census, is 940 females per 1,000 males.^[360] The median age was

28.7 in 2020.^[293] The first post-colonial census, conducted in 1951, counted 361 million people.^[362] Medical advances made in the last 50 years as well as increased agricultural productivity brought about by the "Green Revolution" have caused India's population to grow rapidly.^[363]

The life expectancy in India is at 70 years—71.5 years for women, 68.7 years for men.^[293] There are around 93 physicians per 100,000 people.^[364] Migration from rural to urban areas has been an important dynamic in India's recent history. The number of people living in urban areas grew by 31.2% between 1991 and 2001.^[365] Yet, in 2001, over 70% still lived in rural areas.^{[366][367]} The level of urbanisation increased further from 27.81% in the 2001 Census to 31.16% in the 2011 Census. The slowing down of the overall population growth rate was due to the sharp decline in the growth rate in rural areas since 1991.^[368] According to the 2011 census, there are 53 million-plus urban agglomerations in India; among them Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad, in decreasing order by population.^[369] The literacy rate in 2011 was 74.04%: 65.46% among females and 82.14% among males.^[370] The rural-urban literacy gap, which was 21.2 percentage points in 2001, dropped to 16.1 percentage points in 2011. The improvement in the rural literacy rate is twice that of urban areas.^[368] Kerala is the most literate state with 93.91% literacy; while Bihar the least with 63.82%.^[370]



The interior of San Thome Basilica, Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Christianity is believed to have been introduced to India by the late 2nd century by Syriac-speaking Christians.

Among speakers of the Indian languages, 74% speak Indo-Aryan languages, the easternmost branch of the Indo-European languages; 24% speak Dravidian languages, indigenous to South Asia and spoken widely before the spread of Indo-Aryan languages and 2% speak Austroasiatic languages or the Sino-Tibetan languages. India has no national language.^[371] Hindi, with the largest number of speakers, is the o