

India, officially the **Republic of India** (*Hindi*: *Bhārat Gaṇarājya*),^[25] is a country in [South Asia](#). It is the [seventh-largest country](#) by area, the [second-most populous](#) country, and the most populous [democracy](#) in the world. Bounded by the [Indian Ocean](#) on the south, the [Arabian Sea](#) on the southwest, and the [Bay of Bengal](#) on the southeast, it shares land borders with [Pakistan](#) to the west;^[1] [China](#), [Nepal](#), and [Bhutan](#) to the north; and [Bangladesh](#) and [Myanmar](#) to the east. In the Indian Ocean, India is in the vicinity of [Sri Lanka](#) and the [Maldives](#); its [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#) share a maritime border with [Thailand](#), Myanmar, and [Indonesia](#).

[Modern humans](#) arrived on the [Indian subcontinent](#) from Africa no later than 55,000 years ago.^{[26][27][28]} Their long occupation, initially in varying forms of isolation as hunter-gatherers, has made the region highly diverse, second only to Africa in human [genetic diversity](#).^[29] [Settled life](#) emerged on the subcontinent in the western margins of the [Indus river basin](#) 9,000 years ago, evolving gradually into the [Indus Valley Civilisation](#) of the third millennium BCE.^[30] By 1200 BCE, an [archaic form](#) of [Sanskrit](#), an [Indo-European language](#), had [diffused](#) into India from the northwest.^{[31][32]} Its evidence today is found in the hymns of the [Rigveda](#). Preserved by a resolutely vigilant [oral tradition](#), the *Rigveda* records the dawning of [Hinduism](#) in India.^[33] The [Dravidian languages](#) of India were supplanted in the northern and western regions.^[34] By 400 BCE, [stratification](#) and [exclusion](#) by [caste](#) had emerged within Hinduism,^[35] and [Buddhism](#) and [Jainism](#) had arisen, proclaiming [social orders](#) unlinked to heredity.^[36] Early political consolidations gave rise to the loose-knit [Maurya](#) and [Gupta Empires](#) based in the [Ganges Basin](#).^[37] Their collective [era](#) was suffused with wide-ranging creativity,^[38] but also marked by the declining status of women,^[39] and the incorporation of [untouchability](#) into an organised system of belief.^{[40][41]} In [South India](#), the [Middle kingdoms](#) exported Dravidian-languages scripts and religious cultures to the kingdoms of [Southeast Asia](#).^[41]

In the early medieval era, [Christianity](#), [Islam](#), [Judaism](#), and [Zoroastrianism](#) became established on India's southern and western coasts.^[42] Muslim armies from [Central Asia](#) intermittently overran India's northern plains,^[43] eventually founding the [Delhi Sultanate](#), and drawing northern India into the cosmopolitan [networks of medieval Islam](#).^[44] In the 15th century, the [Vijayanagara Empire](#) created a long-lasting composite Hindu culture in south India.^[45] In the [Punjab](#), [Sikhism](#) emerged, rejecting institutionalised religion.^[46] The [Mughal Empire](#), in 1526, ushered in two centuries of relative peace,^[47] leaving a legacy of luminous architecture.^[48] Gradually expanding [rule of the British East India Company](#) followed, turning India into a colonial economy, but also consolidating its [sovereignty](#).^[49] [British Crown rule](#) began in 1858. The rights promised to Indians were granted slowly,^{[50][51]} but [technological changes](#) were introduced, and modern ideas of education and the public life took root.^[52] A pioneering and influential nationalist movement emerged, which was noted for nonviolent resistance and became the major factor in ending British rule.^{[53][54]} In 1947 the British Indian Empire was [partitioned](#) into two independent [dominions](#),^{[55][56][57][58]} a Hindu-majority [Dominion of India](#) and a Muslim-majority [Dominion of Pakistan](#), amid large-scale loss of life and an unprecedented migration.^[59]

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 1.4 billion in 2022.^[60] During the same time, its nominal [per capita income](#) increased from US\$64 annually to US\$1,498, and its literacy rate from 16.6% to 74%. From being a comparatively destitute country in 1951,^[61] India has become a [fast-growing major economy](#) and a hub for [information technology services](#), with an expanding middle class.^[62] It has [a space programme](#) which includes several planned or completed [extraterrestrial missions](#). Indian movies, music, and spiritual teachings play an increasing role in global culture.^[63] India has substantially reduced its rate of poverty, though at the cost of increasing economic inequality.^[64] India is a [nuclear-weapon state](#), which ranks high in [military expenditure](#). It has disputes over [Kashmir](#) with its neighbours, Pakistan and China, unresolved since the mid-20th century.^[65] Among the socio-economic challenges India faces are [gender inequality](#), [child malnutrition](#),^[66] and rising levels of [air pollution](#).^[67] India's land is [megadiverse](#), with four [biodiversity hotspots](#).^[68] Its forest cover comprises 21.7% of its area.^[69] [India's wildlife](#), which

has traditionally been viewed with tolerance in [India's culture](#),^[70] is supported among these forests, and elsewhere, in [protected habitats](#).

According to the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) (third edition 2009), the name "India" is derived from the [Classical Latin](#) *India*, a reference to [South Asia](#) and an uncertain region to its east; and in turn 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 implication, its well-settled southern basin.^{[71][72]} The [ancient Greeks](#) referred to the Indians as *Indoi* (*Ἰνδοί*), which translates as "The people of the Indus".^[73]

The term [Bharat](#) (*Bhārat*; pronounced [ˈbʱaːɾət] listen[ⓘ]), mentioned in both [Indian epic poetry](#) and the [Constitution of India](#),^{[74][75]} is used in its variations by [many Indian languages](#). A modern rendering of the historical name *Bharatavarsha*, which applied originally to [North India](#),^{[76][77]} *Bharat* gained increased currency from the mid-19th century as a native name for India.^{[74][78]}

[Hindustan](#) ([ɦɪndʊˈstaːn] listen[ⓘ]) is a [Middle Persian](#) name for India, introduced during the [Mughal Empire](#) and used widely since. Its meaning has varied, referring to a region encompassing present-day northern India and [Pakistan](#) or to India in its near entirety

By 55,000 years ago, the first modern humans, or *Homo sapiens*, had arrived on the Indian subcontinent from Africa, where they had earlier evolved.^{[26][27][28]} The earliest known modern human remains in South Asia date to about 30,000 years ago.^[26] 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 what is now [Balochistan](#), [Pakistan](#).^[81] These gradually developed into the [Indus Valley Civilisation](#),^{[82][81]} the first urban culture in South Asia,^[83] which flourished during 2500–1900 BCE in what is now Pakistan and western India.^[84] 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.^[83]

During the period 2000–500 BCE, many regions of the subcontinent transitioned from the [Chalcolithic](#) cultures to the [Iron Age](#) ones.^[85] The [Vedas](#), the oldest scriptures associated with [Hinduism](#),^[86] were composed during this period,^[87] and historians have analysed these to posit a [Vedic culture](#) in the [Punjab region](#) and the upper [Gangetic Plain](#).^[85] Most historians also consider this period to have encompassed several waves of [Indo-Aryan migration](#) into the subcontinent from the north-west.^[86] 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.^[88] On the [Deccan Plateau](#), archaeological evidence from this period suggests the existence of a chiefdom stage of political organisation.^[85] In [South India](#), a progression to sedentary life is indicated by the large number of [megalithic](#) monuments dating from this period,^[89] as well as by nearby traces of [agriculture](#), [irrigation tanks](#), and craft traditions.^[89]



Cave 26 of the rock-cut [Ajanta Caves](#)

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](#).^{[90][91]} 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](#).^[92] [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.^{[93][94][95]} In an age of increasing urban wealth, both religions held up [renunciation](#) as an ideal,^[96] 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 [Mauryan Empire](#).^[97] 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.^{[98][99]} 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](#).^{[100][101]}

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 [Pandyas](#), dynasties that [traded extensively with the Roman Empire](#) and with [West](#) and [Southeast Asia](#).^{[102][103]} In North India, Hinduism asserted patriarchal control within the family, leading to increased subordination of women.^{[104][97]} 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.^{[105][106]} Under the Guptas, a renewed Hinduism based on devotion, rather than the management of ritual, began to assert itself.^[107] This renewal was reflected in a flowering of [sculpture](#) and [architecture](#), which found patrons among an urban elite.^[106] [Classical Sanskrit literature](#) flowered as well, and [Indian science](#), [astronomy](#), [medicine](#), and [mathematics](#) made significant advances