COUNTRY

PROFILE PROJECT

India

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<div align="center">Country Profile Paper: India</div>

India is a state with a deep and rich cultural history. Arguably, the single most important event in Indian history was the rise of the Harappan civilization in the Indus Valley located in what's now northwest India around 3300 to 1700 BCE. During this time, both Buddhism and Hinduism found their roots in the Indus River Valley, where archeologists have unearthed stonework depicting Hindu gods as well as statues of figures in yoga positions like those required for Buddhist meditation. They have also retrieved a four-faced human seal from the valley, a common symbol used by the religion of Jainism. These three religions have been extremely formative on the Indian subcontinent's history and culture, with Hinduism being the major religion in India and the third largest in the world (Greene). The rigid caste system practiced in Hinduism was also developed during this time and has stuck with the country ever since. Though discrimination against the very bottom caste, the "untouchable" Dalits, was outlawed after India gained its independence in 1947, the caste system is still "omnipresent" in much of India, especially rural areas (Agrawal).

The other two important events in India's history were the colonization of country by the East India Company— and subsequently Britain itself— in the late 17th century and the following

struggle for Independence that took place post-World War II. The effect of British colonial rule on India is undeniable. They used brute force and coercion to exploit the Indian people's labor to grow cash crops or procure and process raw materials for the British industrial machine. The British entirely monopolized the sale and distribution of raw materials, consolidating the majority of political, economic, and social power in the hands of a few. However, British rule did manage to consolidate the many warring empires in the Indian subcontinent into one and also managed to industrialize and modernize India. A new middle class and landowning aristocracy also arose due to business and educational opportunities that were created in the wake of British rule. Transportation and communication systems in India vastly expanded and courts of law, constabularies, and commercial agencies were also established throughout the country (Basu).

According to the CIA World Factbook, India is a federal parliamentary republic with three branches such as our own government: an executive, legislative, and judicial one. The current chief of state has been President Pranab Mukherjee since 2012 but his powers are mostly symbolic and ceremonial. Both the president and vice president are elected in five-year terms by an electoral college composed of members of the bicameral parliament as well as legislators of the country's 28 states. Though there are no term limits, only one president has been reelected.

The bicameral legislature consists of the upper house, the Council of State (Rajya Sabha) and the lower house, the House of the People (Lok Sabha). The Raya Sabha has 245 seats with 6-year terms, 12 which are appointed by the president. The Lok Sabha has 545 members with 5-year terms, 2 which are appointed by the president. The majority party in the parliament (currently the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)) elects the prime minister from among themselves. The Prime Minister (currently Narendra Modi) serves as the leader of the majority party, the

head of the executive branch, and also the leader of the Council of States. The majority of the

legislative power rests in the Cabinet of India which is composed of the Cabinet Minister and

Ministers of State, the prior being charge of an entire ministry such as energy or education while

the latter is in charge of overseeing the specifics such as natural gas and technological education.

These bodies shape and implement policy and law (CIA).

India participates in first-past-the-post elections to directly vote for the House of the

People and use proportional representation through indirect elections by state and territory

assemblies rather than the people to choose Council of State members. Boundaries of precincts

are updated following a census every ten years, much like in the United States. India grants a

great deal of autonomy to state and union territory governments and thus allows for more

political participation at the state and local government. State legislative assemblies (Vidhan

Sabhas) are directly elected by the people of the state and have a bicameral organization in

some states. Elections to these assemblies is the same as the Lok Sabha system with first-past-

the-post and single-member districts in play.

Elections are open to any citizen over the age of 18 regardless of caste, religion, or

gender with the exception of those deemed to have an "unsound" mind and certain criminals.

Elections for the lower house and Vidhan Sabhas take place every five years but can be called

earlier if the president believes that the government cannot command the confidence of the Lok

Sabha. Rather than doing tiered election cycles where only part of the parliament is up for

reelection, every seat is up for grabs during election year.

The actual campaign process is one that quite brief and expedient. Candidates are given a week to put forth their nominations to be scrutinized by a bureaucratic office called the Returning Office. They must submit an appropriate free to the office in order to be placed on the ballot which will be refunded if they get at least 6% of the vote. After careful examination, the Returning Office draws up the list of official candidates, kicking off a two week-long campaign season in which the candidates and parties make their case to the voters. Political parties set out their agenda, flaunt their leader while bashing the opposition, and hold rallies. Election day varies in India, as the government tries to schedule it to accommodate the staggering 600 million voters in different areas of the country.

There are also tight legal limits on money in Indian politics, with most candidates being restricted on the amount of money they spend on an election campaign. All recognized national and state political parties are allotted free access to state-owned electronic media; airtime is based on a combination of a base limit and additional time awarded based on poll performance from previous election. To become a recognized political party, one must register with the Election Commission which determines whether or not the party would uphold the constitution have a commitment to the "sovereignty, unity and integrity of India" (Election Commission of India). The major political parties are the aforementioned BJP and the Indian National Congress; combined, these two parties account for about half of the seats in the legislature.

Perhaps the most pressing social/historical/economic contextual issues affecting modern-day India is the caste system. Students in higher castes have significantly higher literacy rate and perform better in school, possibly due to an inferiority complex harbored by lower castes. Low caste families are often relegated to living in the fringes of towns and settlements, working as

agricultural laborers for pitiful wages. Lower caste members are also often subjected to sub-human treatments by higher castes. The story of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar is one of the most poignant example of the discrimination practiced by the caste system. Despite getting doctorate degrees in economics at both Columbia University and the London School of Economics, many people back in India refused to work with him due to his status as an untouchable. This prompted Ambedkar to launch a movement demanding equality and respect for lower castes, but he largely had to put his Dalit liberation rhetoric in the backburner as it posed a potential discrepancy to Mahatma Gandhi's idea of Indian unity against the British (Queen).

Though affirmative action programs are in place to help give the Dalit a leg-up in educational and occupational opportunities, many of them still face discrimination from the upper castes and do not have access to a support network as extensive as many of theirs is so many drop out of school or fail to find adequate employment upon graduation. The caste system, while illegal, still very much defines the social, political, and economic opportunities that a person has access to (Venkatesh).

One aspect about India's political system that is very similar to the United States is their usage of a federal system with a bicameral legislature. Much like our own state governments, Indian states have some autonomy over their government but if a conflict arises between the state and federal law, federal law is supreme. They also use an electoral college similar to the one we use in the United States to select their president, though our president is both the head of state and government while theirs is only the former. Their presidential and legislative campaigns for office are much shorter and are arguably less influenced by money.

Though India was pegged as the world's fastest growing economy this past year, the country still faces a range of social, political, and economic problems. India's economic progress has not evenly distributed, with disparity between the haves and have nots having ballooned in the past few decades as economic policies in the countries and between its trading partners have largely benefitted a small portion of all Indians. India's population growth rate is a staggering 20% per decade, largely fueled by high fertility rates in low-income and uneducated rural communities. People born in rural communities are unlikely to stay there and instead will move to big, crowded cities that simply cannot accommodate for the mass number of people moving there all trying to find work, be they educated and qualified or not (Biswas and Hartley). This further contributes to inequality between urban and rural and also places an increased burden of the country's resources with more people that need to be accounted for.

Women in India face particularly appalling challenges. India is ranked as the worst country to be a woman in among G20 countries, which is saying something as it beat out Saudi Arabia for the top spot. India's archaic dowry system, which is outlawed but still practiced *de facto* in many parts of the country, means that women are an economic burden to families. As a result, many Indian women are compelled to abort female babies or abandon them in the elements. According to *The Guardian,* "There is currently no special law in India against sexual assault or harassment, and only vaginal penetration by a penis counts as rape". Women are often treated as the property of men, judged heavily on the basis of their clothing, and are sexually harassed— even gang raped— in broad daylight (Pidd). Lower economic and educational opportunities for women have been linked to high birthrates, meaning that the

deplorable treatment of women will only further exacerbate their population concerns (University of St. Andrews).

India has a bright future ahead of it if it finds how to sustain its impressive economic growth while respecting the environment and expanding opportunities to lower castes and women. I believe that a large section of this could come through massive government-founded infrastructure projects that would help link rural India to the cities and also modernize these parts of the country by broadening the socioeconomic and educational opportunities available to the people living there. There's signs that this will happen in the near future as Prime Minister Modi recently announced proposed reforms to loosen India's taut small business restrictions as well as improve the country's infrastructure. This comes a year after India received $33 billion from private and public sources in Japan on top of a $20 billion infrastructure investment with China, both helping enable India to begin overhauling its crowded transportation system and bring clean water and electricity to more people (Sanghoee). India is the world's largest democracy and has been a great example of what newly-industrialized countries are capable of. Though India has all the makings of a global superpower, it is ultimately up to the India people and government to fully utilize their potential.

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