General World Cultures

Chapter 29- India

**subcontinent**- a large portion of a continent that is geographically isolated from the rest of the continent

**monsoon**- a seasonal wind that creates a strong pattern of wet and dry seasons in parts of Asia

**reincarnation**- rebirth into a new body or physical form in this world

**incarnation**- the particular physical form that a spirit takes in this world

**karma**- a fate or destiny shaped by one’s past actions in this lifetime or in a previous lifetime

**caste**- a fixed social class into which one is born and from which one cannot move

**The Indian Subcontinent**

\* Bombay, now called Munbai, is located in part of southern Asia called the Indian **subcontinent**. This part of Asia is cut off from the rest of the region by mountains and jungles. India is the largest country on the subcontinent. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan are also on the subcontinent. Northwest Pakistan is Afghanistan, which separates the Indian subcontinent from Central Asia.

\* The Himalayas form the northern border of the subcontinent. Which landform, oceans, lakes, mountains, or deserts are most important in forming a culture? Why?

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They are the tallest mountains in the WORLD and stretch about 1,500 miles. Mount Everest, a Himalayan peak in Napal, is the highest point on the Earth. It is 29,028 feet tall. The Himalayas create a barrier so large, it is rarely crossed except by plane.

\* South of the Himalayas is a large, open plain. It covers most of northern India, part of Pakistan, and all of Bangladesh. Three important rivers flow out of the Himalayas and through this plain: the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra.

\* The climate of the Indian subcontinent varies quite a bit. The northern mountains have a dry climate, much like that of Central Asia. In the northwest is a barren region called the Thar Desert. The plains of the northeast are mild and moist. Much of India is heavily affected by the **monsoons**. These are seasonal winds that change direction regularly, twice a year. Between May and October, the monsoons blow from the ocean towards land. Beginning around July, monsoons bring warm weather and heavy rains- as much as 15 inches a month. Between October and May, the monsoons blow the other way- from the land out to sea. During these months, the winds bring cooler, dry weather from Central Asia.

*Complete the Indian Subcontinent Map Study on page 433.*

\* The major landform in central India is the Decan Plateau. It has low hills and shallow valleys. Three small mountain ranges line its edges.

\* India has more than 200 languages spoken in the country. At least 24 of the languages are spoken by more than ONE MILLION people. There are 25 states in India, each with its own official language or languages. Hindi is the official national language, but only 30% of the people speak it. Bengali, Tamil, Urds, and English are important languages, too. Have you heard of any of the languages besides English?

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**An Ancient Culture**

\* The Dravidians were probably the first settlers in what is now India. They built a civilization along the Indus River over 5,000 years ago. The Aryans took over after them. 25% of the people in India are descendants of Dravidians.

\* The Aryans brought religion (Hinduism) and language. Most people are of Aryan descent.

\* Muslims added much to the culture of India. Their support made Urdu a major language. The Taj Majal, a tomb of the Mogul Quees, is often called the world’s most beautiful building. Muslims remain a large, separate minority in modern India.

Here is a clip from Pawn Stars about the Jewels of the Taj Majal.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiIHvQovKkk>

Here is another Taj Majal video that is quite interesting.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9dvrQ26arA>

\* The next outsiders to rule India were the British, starting in the 1700s. As a result of the rule, English is still the language of business throughout the country. The laws and government of India are modeled on those of Britain. The British also created the world’s most extensive railroad system in India.

Why might a railroad system be important in India? Give specific examples.

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**Hinduism**

\* About 82@ of the people in India call themselves Hindus. Unlike some religions, Hinduism had no precise beginning or founder. It has no single holy book, but many sacred texts. Hindus worship THOUSANDS of gods. Each Hindu is free to choose his or her favorite. All Hindus, however, share certain broad ideas.

\* Hindus believe that every living creature has a soul, and that every soul is part of a larger spirit. According to the Hindus, when people die, their souls are reborn into new bodies in a process called **reincarnation**. Each time people are reincarnated, they move up or down the social order, depending on how they lived. Good **beggars**, or people who ask for money**,** may become kings, and bad kings may become beggars.

\* Like other religions, the goal is nirvana, where the soul becomes one great soul called Brahman. Brahman is everlasting and unchanging. Brahman has many **incarnations**. These incarnations are the gods of Hinduism. For example, there is Vishnu the Preserver, who appeared in the world in several forms.

\* According to Hinduism, everything that a person does influences what will eventually happen to that person. This is called the law of **karma**. Everything that a person does in life will also add to his or her karma for the next life. Living right moves people closer to nirvana.

**The Hindu Way of Life**

\* Hinduism is more than a religion. It is a way of life. A Hindu’s whole day is filled with religious rituals. Ordinary activities such as eating, bathing, and brushing teeth are rituals. Birth, marriage, death, and other important life events also have rituals.

\* The Hindu way of life is held in place by a strict **caste** system. Hinduism teaches that every person is born into a caste and cannot leave it until he or she dies. After death, a person may be reborn into a higher or lower caste depending on his or her karma. The caste system is thus like a ladder. Only from the top rung can they reach nirvana.

\* Early Hinduism recognized four castes. At the top were priests, or Brahmins. Below them were kings and warriors. Lower were landowners and **merchants**. A merchant is a retail trader and/or a storeowner. At the bottom were workers. Below the bottom was a group called the Untouchables, who had no caste at all. Originally, these were probably the Darvidian people whom the Aryans had conquered.

\* Over the centuries, the four castes were divided into thousands of subcastes called jatis. Many jatis are tied to particular jobs. A shoemaker may be of one jati while a barber is of another, for example.

\* A person may not marry or socialize outside his or her caste. For example, do you think that teachers should only be allowed to talk with other teachers? Perhaps people that work at fast food restaurants should only be able to talk with their own?

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\* Only by remaining dutiful to their caste can people rise to another caste in the next life. Those who complain or struggle against the system will only sink to a lower caste. Thus, the caste system will encourage people to accept their place in life. The caste system has brought order to India, but is has also prevented social change and progress toward equality. Each person must wear the clothes that mark his or her caste. A person of one caste must speak to people of other castes in certain ways. A person of one caste cannot eat food prepared by people of other castes.

\* In modern India, laws have been passed to weaken the caste system. For example, Untouchables now have the right to own property, which they did not have in the past. However, the caste system remains strong, especially in villages. Marriages between castes are rare, and Untouchables are still treated poorly.

\* Rivers are sacred to Hindus, and the Ganges is most sacred of all. Millions of people bathe in its holy waters during a festival called Kumbh Mela.

**Other Religions in India**

\* Hinduism has many branches, and some of these branches have grown into whole new religions. Buddhism, for example, began 2,600 years ago as a movement to reform The Buddha accepted the Hindu ideas of reincarnation, karma, and nirvana. He dismissed most Hindu rituals and rejected the caste system. He said that everyone could reach nirvana in a lifetime, if they followed the path he taught.

\* Muslims make up about 11% of the Indian population- about 90 million people. That makes India the 5th-largest Islamic country in the world. Muslims and Hindus have a long history of conflict in India. The trouble is partly rooted in history. The Muslims invaded India and looted cities for six centuries. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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\* The conflict goes beyond history, however. Two religions could hardly be more different than Hinduism and Islam. Islam, for example, insists that there is only one god. Hindus, however, worship many gods. Islam holds everyone to be equal, but Hinduism puts everyone in a caste. Muslims eat beef but not pork. Hindus will eat pork, but they consider cows sacred.

**Three Nations From One Colony**

\* The British first came into India when the British East India Company set up trading posts along the coast. By the 1700s, the company controlled trade in India. Soon, this private company was running India like a government and hire Indian soldiers, or **sepoys**, to protect its business. In 1857, the sepoys rebelled, the British government stepped in, and India became an official British colony.

\* Within a generation, the people from India formed the Congress Party to seek independence from Britain. In the 1920s, the great Hindu leader Mahatma Gandhi became the head of this political party. Gandhi preached complete nonviolence. As millions joined Gandhi’s movement, India became impossible to govern.

\* The Congress Party was not the only group seeking independence. Another was the Muslim league, led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. The group wanted a separate country for the Muslims of the subcontinent.

\* By 1947, the British knew they had to give up their colony. They decided to divide the subcontinent into two countries. One would be India, a country with a Hindu majority. The other would be Pakistan, a Muslim nation. As soon as the new borders became official, Hindus rushed out of Pakistan into India. Muslims, in turn, went to Pakistan. Riots occurred throughout the subcontinent. Why might riots occur? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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As many as 500,000 people were killed. Within 6 months, roughly 13 million people had moved within the region.

Bangladesh has more people per square mile than any other country in the world. What kinds of problems does a crowded country have? Be specific. Benefits?

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**Earning a Living**

\* In India, at least 650 million people live in small villages. Most of these people work as farmers. More than one-third of these farmers own no land. They work someone else’s land in exchange for a share of the crops. Many Indian farmers still use the wooden plows pulled by oxen or buffalo.

\* In recent years, the government has helped farmers to form cooperatives. These organized groups of farmers can borrow enough money to buy farm machinery. Thus, cooperatives have helped to improve living conditions for many farmers. India’s food production is now growing faster than its population.

\* Even though India has a huge rural population, India is a highly industrialized country. India makes everything from cars to toothpaste. It supplies all the consumer goods used by its citizens. It trains more engineers and scientists than any other nation expect the United States and Russia. It has nuclear power plants and nuclear bombs. Industrialization in India has led to rapidly growing cities. Unfortunately, millions of people in these crowded and overgrown cities can barely make a living. Cows are important to India’s economy. Killing cows is forbidden in most of India.

**Housing and Health**

\* A typical village house in India has mud-brick wall, one room, and no windows. People go indoors mainly to sleep. The rest of the time, they live outdoors. Good housing is a problem for the people of India. In the cities of India, the problem worsens: Some people live in fine, large houses, while millions live in large slums. Many people are homeless and live on the streets.

\* Clean water is in short supply in India. People may have to use the same water for cleaning, drinking, AND carrying away human waste. In such conditions, cholera, typhoid, and other diseases spread quickly.

\* Malnutrition also adds to the health problems in India. Few of the people who live on farms eat three meals per day. People weakened by hunger are less able to fight off disease. In recent years, India has trained many doctors and built health clinics all over the country. Medical care has improved, but this has led to rapid population growth. India has more than one and a quarter billion people.

\* One way to measure health standards is to look at **life expectancy**. This is the average length of time that people are expected to live. People who get enough food and medical care tend to live longer. In India in 1947, the life expectancy rate was only about 28 years old. Today, the rate in India is about 62 for men and 64 for women. In more developed countries, where most people have enough food and medical care, the rates are higher. Let’s try a life expectancy calculator at the following: <http://media.nmfn.com/tnetwork/lifespan/#13>

**Clothing and Food**

\* In India, the sari is the national dress for women. It is a piece of cloth about six yards long, wrapped around the body. Most city men wear Western clothes, but rural villages usually wear a dhoti. This is a long strip of cloth that is wrapped around the waist wand tucked in to form pants. Because India has such warm weather, light-colored, cotton clothes are common.

\* Each region of India has its own style of cooking. In general, curries are representative of the cuisine in the north. A curry is a dish made with a blend of spices such as cumin and coriander. The cooking of southern India uses fewer spices, but more hot pepper.

**Dances and Music**

\* The tradition of classical dancing is highly developed in India. Each region has its own styles. Kathak dancing, for example, is popular in the north. Kathak dancers wear ankle bracelets that make noise when they dance. It is kind of like tap dancing.

\* The classical music of India began developing at least 3,000 years ago. The music is usually performed by a small group. The instruments always include small hand drums and often include a stringed instrument such as a sitar.

\* Movies are India’s main popular art. India makes about 800 films a year. Most large villages have their own movie theatres.