



The Culture of India

TERMS & NAMES

Taj Mahal
Mahabharata
dialect
Indo-Aryan
Dravidian
dowry

MAIN IDEA

India's rich cultural heritage has its roots in a long history and the influences of other cultures.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The languages, arts, and traditions of India, a country with over a billion people, have an international influence.

DATELINE

AGRA, NORTHERN INDIA, 1648

With tears in his eyes, Shah Jahan watched today as workers put the finishing touches on the Taj Mahal. The building is made of rare white marble and is decorated with semiprecious stones, such as lapis lazuli, crystal, and jade. The Taj Mahal is to be the tomb of Shah Jahan's wife, who died giving birth to their 14th child. "Some day, when I depart," Shah Jahan said, "we will lie here together forever."



Culture • The Taj Mahal has taken 20,000 workers 22 years to build. ▲

The Taj Mahal

The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan built the **Taj Mahal** for his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. This white marble building with its onion-shaped domes and thin towers is one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture in the world. Today, it is India's most famous building and a symbol of India's rich artistic heritage.



India and the Arts

Literature Two great works of world literature come from India. One, the *Mahabharata* (MAH•huh•BAH•ruh•tuh), is an epic poem, which means that it tells a lengthy story, in a grand style, of one or more heroes.

The *Ramayana* is another famous epic poem. Both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* have influenced painters, dancers, and other writers in India. Both are important because they tell about the growth of Hinduism.

Music and Film India has several styles of music, and each style is unique to a region of India. Music is played and sung in concerts, at parties, or in religious settings. Indians also love to see movies. India makes more films every year than any other country, including the United States. In rural areas, movie vans travel to villages to show films outdoors.



Culture • Long-necked stringed instruments, like the sitars (sih•TAHRS) shown here, are used to play North Indian classical music. ▲

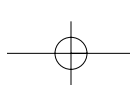
The Languages of India

The constitution of India now recognizes 18 official languages. However, Indians speak hundreds of other languages and dialects. A **dialect** is a regional variety of a language. Most languages in India come from one of two families: Indo-Aryan or Dravidian.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Location** • In what states are the Dravidian languages mainly spoken?
- Place** • What language would you hear spoken in the state of Rajasthan?



The Indo-Aryan Language Family **Indo-Aryan** languages are related to the Indo-European language family, which comes from the ancient Aryan language Sanskrit and includes almost all European languages. Today, about three-fourths of the people in northern and central India speak Indo-Aryan languages.

The Dravidian Language Family About one-fourth of all Indians speak Dravidian languages. **Dravidian** was the language spoken centuries ago in India. As invaders moved into the north, the speakers of Dravidian moved south.

English English, which came to India with British colonialism, is spoken by less than 5 percent of the population. However, because it is the language of business, government, and science, English is important in India.

Reading Social Studies

A. Drawing Conclusions
What problems might exist when neighbors speak different languages?

Religion in Daily Life

Most people in India are Hindus. There are no rules dictating how Hinduism is practiced, nor is there one Hindu church. Many Hindus are vegetarians. Some Hindus perform daily rituals on behalf of their gods. The caste system, which is still in place in India, is less rigid than it once was.

Many Muslims who had been living in India moved to Pakistan and East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Today, 14 percent of Indians are Muslim.

BACKGROUND

Look back to Chapters 8 and 13 to review what you read about Islam and Hinduism.



The Mahabharata One of the greatest works of world literature comes from India. The epic poem the *Mahabharata* is the longest poem in the world. It was composed over a period of about 800 years, from about 400 B.C. to A.D. 400. The *Mahabharata* tells the story of two warring families, the five Pandava brothers (shown at right) and the Kauravas.

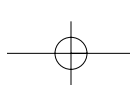
One famous section of the poem is called the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In this section, Arjuna, the leader of the Pandavas, receives good advice from his chariot driver, who is actually the god Krishna in disguise.



THINKING CRITICALLY



- 1. Clarifying** How do you know that more than one person must have created the *Mahabharata*?
- 2. Making Inferences** What do you think might happen to the events in a story created like the *Mahabharata*?



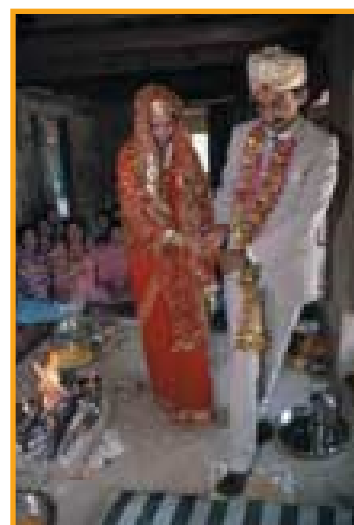
The Family in India

Family is important to Indians. Often, several related families live together. Parents choose a bride or groom for their children from a family of the same caste. Parents may consider a potential mate's education, financial status, or even horoscope to help them make a decision.

Parents prefer sons to daughters, partly because men have more power in this society. Women who have male children have greater influence in their families. These attitudes are beginning to change.

Also, when a woman marries, her parents must provide a **dowry**, money or property given by a bride to her new husband and his family. This can be expensive, especially for rural families. As India modernizes, this practice, too, is beginning to change.

Family Meals A typical meal varies from region to region in India. In the south and east, a meal usually includes rice. In the north and northwest, people eat a flat bread called a *chapati* (chuh•PAH•tee). Along with rice or *chapatis*, a meal may include beans or lentils, some vegetables, and maybe yogurt. Chili peppers and other spices like cardamom, cinnamon, and cumin give the food extra flavor. Meat is rarely eaten, either because it is forbidden by religion or because it is so expensive.



Culture • A bride and groom circle a fire four times as part of a Hindu wedding ceremony. ▲

Reading Social Studies

B. Analyzing Motives Why might parents want to arrange their child's marriage?

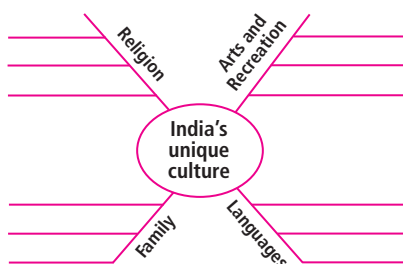
SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) Taj Mahal (b) *Mahabharata* (c) dialect (d) Indo-Aryan
(e) Dravidian (f) dowry

Taking Notes

2. Use a spider map like the one below to list the unique traits of India's culture.



Main Ideas

3. (a) Why are there so many official languages in India?
(b) What religion plays the biggest role in Indian culture?
(c) How is family an important part of Indian life?

Critical Thinking

4. Finding Causes

Why do you think English is the language of business and government in India?

Think About

- ♦ India's colonial history
- ♦ the country's cultural diversity

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Develop a **plot** for an Indian movie. Describe it in a paragraph, and share your idea with a classmate.