



## A Geographical Mosaic of Incredible India Introducing Natural and Cultural Heritage

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### Introduction

India is a country with amazing geographical diversity together with plurality in language, religion, culture and ethnicity. It is a country of second largest human resources of the world with a population of more than 1027 million people supporting nearly 16.8 per cent of world's population. From the mountains of the Himalaya in Kashmir to the sea coasts of **Kanyakumari** and from the **Thar** deserts of Rajasthan to the humid forests of northeast, India displays her wealth of diversity in cultures, religious fairs and festivals. Indeed, India is a unity in diversity. The country extends up to 3200km from south to north and 3000km from east to west covering 32,87,263 sq.km.

### Historical Development and Civilization

The name India is derived from Sindhu(Indus), the great river in the north-west. In traditional and legendary Hindu literature, India is called Bharatkhand; and sometimes called Jambudvipa-one of the seven concentric legendry islands comprising the earth. The earliest traces of history in India, so far discovered, go to the second Inter-Glacial period between 40,000B.C. and 20,000 B.C. and there followed a long period of slow evolution, which gathered momentum during the spectacular Indus Valley Civilization excavated in the in the sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. These two sites bear testimony to the magnificent urban development dating back to 3000B.C. The Harappan culture had declined by about 1700B.C. and a vigorous incursion of the Indo-Aryan speaking people from the Middle East in about 1500B.C.transformed the cultural landscape of the north-western India. The great Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata depict these historical events that took place between 1000-700B.C. The Aryavarta –the homeland of the Aryans-was ruled by the Mauryan kings and others in the Ancient period (321-185 B.C.) and the Mughals in the medieval period (1526-1712 A.D.) followed by the British rule until 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. Urbanization received a major spurt during the medieval and the modern period which witnessed the emergence of a large number of towns and cities as eminent centres of economic, cultural, social and religious diffusion.

### Physical Landscape

Geological history of India started with geological evolution nearly 4.57 billion years ago. Indian geological formations consists of the Deccan trap, the Gondwana and the Vindhyan and those that originated in Pleistocene, Tertiary and Pre-Cambrian periods. Conventionally the country is divided into three physiographic regions viz. the Himalaya and associated mountains chain, the Indus-Ganga-Brahmaputra plains and the Peninsular plateau including the coasts and the islands. The Himalayan Mountain covers about 5,00,000 sq. kms of land and extends over 2500kms. from the Karakorum in the west to the Myanmar in the east. Its width is about 240 kms. World's 14 highest peaks and few large rivers are located in the Himalaya, Indus-Ganga-Brahmaputra plains located in the northern part of the country, extends for 3200kms. The senile peninsular plateau the south is triangular in shape and has some of the oldest mountains of world with elevation varying between 600 and 800mts.

The Islands include the Lakshwadeep (36 coral Islands) and the Andaman (200 Islands) and Nikobar (19 Islands). The soils in India fall into seven categories, namely the



alluvial soils, Black soils, Black soils, Red soils, Laterite soils, Forests soils, Mountain soils and Desert soils.

### **Climate and Water Resources**

India is situated in the Northern hemisphere and the tropic of cancer divides the country into roughly two equal parts. The southern part enjoys a low temperature range while the North is cold in winters and warm for greater part of year exhibiting much greater range in its temperature. Though generally described as a tropical country, India experiences varied climate conditions in different regions. The north is more affected by continental climate while the south has more maritime influence (Arabian sea, Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean). Much of the rain is a gift of the monsoon and is primarily geographic. The annual rainfall of 116cms is only marginally higher than the global mean of 99cms. Special distribution of rainfall in India is characterized by great unevenness. While Mawsynram, located in the southern face of Meghalaya plateau receives the highest annual rainfall in world, India also has one of the driest regions of world i.e. Jaisalmer located in the western part of the country. Generally rainfall decreases from east to west.

India has 4 per cent of the freshwater reserve of the world. The annually 'replenish able' ground water has been estimated at 432 billion cubic meters (BCM). The Ganga basin has the highest potential followed by the Godavari and Brahmaputra. The Indo-Gangetic alluvial plain with an area of around 25,000 km is one of the largest groundwater reservoirs in the world. Of the total groundwater of India, only 30 per cent has been harnessed. Overuse of groundwater in almost all the states of India has led to ground water depletion in large part of the country. In certain areas, like Punjab, the level of groundwater exploitation is over 98 per cent. India is rich in terms of surface water wealth. It has some of the largest rivers of world e.g. the Brahmaputra (2900Kms), the Indus (2810Kms) and the Ganga (2525 Kms). Besides, there are many other large river basins, with basin area of more than 20,000 km. Some of its lakes are internationally known e.g. Chilka, Wular, Sambar etc. Rainfall is the main source of surface water in India. It receives about 4000 BCM of water from precipitation. Of this, monsoon rainfall accounts for about 3000 BCM. The total utilizable water is about 690BCM in the country.

### **Forests, Biodiversity and Land Use**

Great variation in climate conditions has given appearance to variety of forest types including tropical and sub-tropical forests in the Western Ghats and eastern Himalaya, temperature and alpine forests in central and western Himalaya and desert forests in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country. According to Forests Survey of India (2003) ,about 6,78,333km, constituting 20.64 per cent of its geographical area is under forest cover in the country. Very dense forest (VDF) however accounts for only 1.56 per cent while the moderately dense forest (MDF) and open forest account for 10.32 per cent and 8.76 per cent respectively. The total forest and tree cover of the country is estimated to account for 23.68 per cent of the country's land.

India contains a great wealth of biodiversity in its forests, wetlands and marine areas. The country has 7 per cent of the mammals, 12.6 per cent birds, 6.2 per cent reptiles, 4.4 per cent amphibians, 11.7 per cent fishes and 6 per cent flowering plants of the world. Among plants, endemism is estimated as 33 per cent. India contains 172 species (2.9 per cent of world's total) of animals considered globally threatened species. The western Ghat and eastern Himalaya are biodiversity hotspots. The faunal species of India is estimated to be about 81,000, representing about 6.4 per cent world's fauna. Besides other invertebrates, there are about 2546 fish species, 204 amphibians, 428 reptiles, 1228 birds and 372 mammals. About 4,900 species of flowering plants are endemic to the Indian subcontinent. Among the endemic species, 2532 species are found in the Himalaya and adjoining areas,



followed by 1782 species in peninsular India. About 1500 endemic flowering species are facing varying degree of threats of extinction. The number of plant species is estimated to be over 45,000 representing about 7 per cent of world's flora. India is home to 14 biosphere reserves, of which 3 are in the world network of biosphere reserve viz. Sundarban, Gulf of Mannar and Nilgiri.

Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy. Agriculture and allied sectors like forestry, logging and fishing accounted for about 16 per cent of GDP and employed about 60 per cent of India's population. About 43 per cent of total geographical area of the country is used for the agriculture practices. Despite a steady decline of its share in the GDP, agriculture remains largest economic sector and plays a significant role in the overall socioeconomic development of India. Indian agriculture is dependent on monsoon and is called "Gamble of Monsoon". Among the nonfood crops, oilseeds, fiber crops, several plantation crops and forage crops are important. Rice and wheat are the principal food crops grown over the large tract (about 70 per cent of agricultural land) of the country.

### **Economy and Development**

According to 2001 Census, a little over 27 per cent of India's population in 5161 urban centers. Going by the world average of 47 per cent living in urban areas, the share of urban dwellers is rather small, but in terms of total size, the urban population is huge by any measure. At least three cities namely Mumbai (16.37 million), Kolkata (13.22 million) and Delhi (12.79 million) contain a population size of over ten million persons. More than a million people reside in as many as 35 cities of India. The cities of India are a paradox in themselves displaying urban features comparable to any developed country and simultaneously retaining poverty and squalor as evidence in the presence of slums supporting over 40 million people.

The country however has made strenuous strides in achieving rapid development of its industrial base from traditional iron & steel, cotton, jute and sugar to engineering, computer, information technology, communication and biotech industries. However, poverty continues to be a major hurdle in faster socioeconomic transformation. The National Sample Survey for 2011-2015 estimates rural poor at 28.3 per cent and urban poor at 25.7 per cent of the respective population. The Five Year Plans and several other developmental schemes are geared to the upliftment of the poor and sections of the society. Since 1991, the liberalization of the economy and the increasing integration of India with the global economy have helped GDP to grow at 9 per cent or more at the present.

Human development has become an important agenda in the development paradigm in India. Growth and development in literacy have been accorded primacy for such an agenda. According to Census of India (2001), 64.8 per cent of Indian population is literate. There exists however a huge disparity in literacy attainment between the sexes as also among other social groups particularly the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. Various programs such as National Literacy Mission, Serva Shiksha Abhiyan and non-formal education etc. have been launched with a view to achieving total literacy in the years to come. Improvement in health has been an important agenda in overall strategy through the planning period. Sustained effort in improving the health of the people has borne some results in bringing down the crude death rate to 8 per thousand and life expectancy has substantially moved up to 64 years.

Improvement in transport and communication in a vast country like India has been recognized as an important sector of development. Total length of roads in India is over 3.0 million kms including both metaled and unmetaled roads. In terms of road length, India has one of the largest road networks in the world. The National Highways account for less than 2 per cent of the total road network but carry 40 per cent of the movement of goods and



passengers. The total rail route length is about 0.063million kms and of this 0.013million kms is electrified. The railways carry over 11 million passengers and 1.1 million tons of goods every day. There are 14,500kms of waterways and 346 airports in India. Communications facilities show a phenomenal growth during the recent years. Public phone booths, mobile phones, internet facility have grown rapidly in India. The landline telephone have expanded from about 0.084 million connections at the time of independence to about 40 million by the year 2015. In addition, there are about 500 million mobile phones in India in 2015.

### **Culture, Ethics and Unity in Diversity**

A grand synthesis of cultures, religious and languages of the people belonging to different castes and communities has upheld in unity and cohesiveness. It is this synthesis which made India a unique mosaic of cultures. People belonging to several faiths-Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity have coexisted for centuries in a shared space. Diversity in India not merely confined to racial, religious and linguistic distinctions but also permeates deep into patterns of living, life styles, land tenure systems, occupational pursuits, inheritance and succession law, together with local practices, rites and rituals related to social norms and values. The Indian cultural tradition is unique. The notions of dharma (normative order), karma (personal moral commitment) and jati (caste) as the hierachial principle of social signification are basic to Indian society. These were followed by the modern Indo-Aryan languages. The institutional basis of social order and socioeconomic interaction among communities like jajmani system remain unchanged to a larger extent. A plural and multi-ethnic society like India would have an overlapping of ethnic, caste and class groupings. There are more than 285 ethnic tribal communities in India accounting for over 8 per cent of her population. The tribes themselves are not a homogenous group, but display remarkable heterogeneity in their racial, linguistic, religious composition as also in their modes of living and levels of development as well as in the level of sociocultural integration. In spite of this great diversity, India continues to swear by its commitment to secularism and practices democratic form of governance. The federal principle of governance has provided a sense of identity to most people.

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