MY TEENAGE LIFE IN INDIA

MY TEENAGE LIFE IN INDIA

My Teenage Life in AUSTRALIA

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Our Teenage Life in the NAVAJO NATION

CUSTOMS AND CULTURES OF THE WORLD

MY TEENAGE LIFE IN INDIA

By Michael Centore

with Prashant Sarkar

Series Foreword by
Kum-Kum Bhavnani

MASON CREST

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INDIA

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Key Icons to Look For

Words to Understand: These words with their easy-to-understand definitions will increase the reader's understanding of the text, while building vocabulary skills.

Sidebars: This boxed material within the main text allows readers to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspectives by weaving together additional information to provide realistic and holistic perspectives.

Educational Videos: Readers can view videos by scanning our QR codes, providing them with additional educational content to supplement the text. Examples include news coverage, moments in history, speeches, iconic sports moments, and much more!

Text-Dependent Questions: These questions send the reader back to the text for more careful attention to the evidence presented here.

Research Projects: Readers are pointed toward areas of further inquiry connected to each chapter. Suggestions are provided for projects that encourage deeper research and analysis.

Series Glossary of Key Terms: This back-of-the-book glossary contains terminology used throughout this series. Words found here increase the reader's ability to read and comprehend higher-level books and articles in this field.

SERIES FOREWORD

Culture: Parts = Whole

Culture makes us human. Many of us think of culture as something that belongs to a person, a group, or even a country. We talk about the food of a region as being part of its culture (tacos, pupusas, tamales, and burritos all are part of our understanding of food from Mexico, and South and Central America).

We might also talk about the clothes as being important to culture (saris in India, kimonos in Japan, hijabs or *gallibayas* in Egypt, or beaded shirts in the Navajo Nation). Imagine trying to sum up "American" culture using just examples like these! Yet culture does not just belong to a person or even a country. It is not only about food and clothes or music and art, because those things by themselves cannot tell the whole story.

Culture is also about how we live our lives. It is about our lived experiences of our societies and of all the worlds we inhabit. And in this series—Customs and Cultures of the World—you will meet young people who will share their experiences of the cultures and worlds they inhabit.

How does a teenager growing up in South Africa make sense of the history of apartheid, the 1994 democratic elections, and of what is happening now? That is as integral to our world's culture as the ancient ruins in Greece, the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China, the Himalayas above Nepal, and the Amazon rain forests in Brazil.

But these examples are not enough. Greece is also known for its financial uncertainties, Egypt is

known for the uprisings in Tahrir Square, China is known for its rapid development of megacities, Australia is known for its amazing animals, and Brazil is known for the Olympics and its football [soccer] team. And there are many more examples for each nation, region, and person, and some of these examples are featured in these books. The question is: How do you, growing up in a particular country, view your own culture? What do you think of as culture? What is your lived experience of it? How do you come to understand and engage with cultures that are not familiar to you? And, perhaps most importantly, why do you/we want to do this? And how does reading about and experiencing other cultures help you understand your own?

It is perhaps a cliché to say culture forms the central core of our humanity and our dignity. If that's true, how do young adults talk about your own cultures? How do you simultaneously understand how people apparently "different" from you live their lives, and engage with their cultures? One way is to read the stories in this series. The "authors" are just like you, even though they live in different places and in different cultures. We communicated with these young writers over the Internet, which has become the greatest gathering of cultures ever. The Internet is now central to the culture of almost everyone, with young people leading the way on how to use it to expand the horizons of all of us. From those of us born in earlier generations, thank you for opening that cultural avenue!

Let me finish by saying that culture allows us to open our minds, think about worlds different from the ones we live in, and to imagine how people very different from us live their lives. This series of books is just the start of the process, but a crucial start.

I hope you enjoy them.

—Kum-Kum Bhavnani
Professor of sociology and feminist and global studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and an award-winning international filmmaker.

MEET PRASHANT!

My family includes: my mother, who is the school doctor (at Kodaikanal International School); my father, who is a PE teacher and camping coordinator, and my sister in 7th grade.
I am in 10th.

INDIA

Kodaikanal

I live in Kodaikanal. It is a hill station in [the state of] Tamil Nadu in South India. It is approximately 7,000 feet above sea level. I have lived here all my life (15 years) and I really like the place. It is a small town with very nice people. I live inside the school campus, which is nice because it is in a very wooded area with about 40 houses. Most staff children live there and we hang out a lot. The food in Kodaikanal is very good and the range is very broad from Indian food all the way to Italian, Mexican, and American.

India: An Introduction

India is a fascinating, complex, almost mythical place. It was the site of one of the world's oldest civilizations. The tallest mountains on earth rise dramatically along its northeastern border. With 1.2 billion people, it is the largest democracy humankind has ever seen. The people of India have known empires and invasions, **colonial** rule, and the struggle for independence. The country's vibrant, deep, and often tumultuous history has given way to a modern era of progress and growth, particularly in the field of technology.

Words to Understand

colonial   of or relating to a colony, which is a country or place ruled by another, often distant country

monsoon   seasonal high winds of Southern Asia that bring heavy rains

nomadic   describing a person or group that moves from place to place

subcontinent   a region of Southern Asia that usually includes India as well as several other countries

India (in green at left) is the second-largest country—in both size and population—in the crowded area of the world known as Southern Asia.

India is located in Southern Asia, part of a geographical area known as the Indian **subcontinent**. It is a peninsula, bounded on three sides by water: the Bay of Bengal to the southeast, the Arabian Sea to the southwest, and the Laccadive Sea to the south. All three of these seas belong to the vast Indian Ocean that lies below Asia. India shares borders with six different countries: Pakistan to the west; China, Nepal, and Bhutan to the north; and Myanmar and Bangladesh to the east. Its northern borders are dominated by the great chain of mountains known as the Himalayas, home to some of the highest peaks on Earth.

A total land area of 1.26 million square miles makes India the seventh-largest country in the world, a little more than one-third the size of the United States. Its peninsular shape provides a coastline of more than 4,600 miles (7,402 km). In addition to the Himalayas, its terrain ranges from a high plain in the south called the Deccan Plateau to the Thar Desert in the northwest. Rivers including the Indus and Ganges flow through the northern parts of the country, creating rich, fertile plains.

Ancient History

In the third millennium BCE, during the time of the Bronze Age, one of humankind's earliest civilizations was flourishing in the valley of the Indus River in northwestern India. The Indus Valley Civilization was a very advanced, urbanized society. Its well-built homes had indoor plumbing facilities. Its people invented systems of weights and measures, created jewelry and toys for their children, and engaged in trade. They even designed their own writing system, though it remains undecipherable to us today.

The Indus Valley Civilization began its decline around 1800 BCE, likely due to environmental catastrophes such as floods or an earthquake. In 1500 BCE, a group of **nomadic** tribes called the Aryans arrived from the northwest. The Aryans brought new languages as well as myths and legends about the creation of the world. Their interactions with the Indus Valley Civilization created the basis for Indian culture. Indo-Aryans began writing down Aryan creation myths in a language called Sanskrit. These sacred scriptures became known as the Vedas, and would form the foundation of the Hindu religion.

Remains left by the ancient Indus Valley civilization can be viewed at many sites in India and Pakistan, including these at Haruppa in eastern Pakistan.

Invasions and Empires

Further religious developments occurred in India in the sixth century BCE, with the founding of Buddhism and Jainism. At this time India was a collection of city-states and kingdoms called *mahajanapadas*. Its residents were very industrious and became very prosperous. Lured by this wealth, the Persians invaded in 530 BCE. The Greeks followed two centuries later under the leadership of Alexander the Great.

The Muslim Mughal Empire controlled large parts of India until the 1800s. Many buildings from then remain, including this mausoleum in New Delhi, built in 1754.

After Alexander withdrew from India, the Maurya Empire began to consolidate its power across the subcontinent. It reached its height in the third century BCE and became the largest empire in the history of India, a title it still holds to this day. After its decline in 185 BCE, India fragmented into a series of smaller kingdoms. The rise of the Gupta Empire about 500 years later in 320 ushered in a "Golden Age" of peace and cultural advancement in art, literature, astronomy, and other fields.

This peace was disrupted in the 11th century, with a series of invasions that brought Islam to India. The Turkish military leader Mahmud of Ghanzi attacked India 17 times in the early part of the 11th century. In 1175, the Afghan sultan Muhammad Ghori led campaigns into northern and central India that resulted in a strong Islamic presence in the region. A period of Muslim dynasties called the Delhi Sultanate followed for more

than 300 years. This era was broken when Babur, an emperor from Central Asia, invaded India to create the Mughal Empire. The Mughals expanded their territory and unified India's many social groups.

Colonial Rule

Europeans began arriving to India in 1498, when Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut (modern-day Kozhikode on the southwest coast). Explorers from other nations, including the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, began to arrive and establish trading posts, hastening the decline of the Mughal Empire. By the 19th century, the British East India Company had become the dominant presence in India. The British

This illustration captures the many styles of uniform worn by employees and soldiers of the British East India Company during its long rule in India.

government took control of India from the Company in 1858 and incorporated it into the British Empire.

Under British rule, Indian residents were denied many basic rights. A movement for Indian independence began to take shape in the early 20th century. The spiritual leader of this movement was Mohandas Gandhi, a former lawyer who advocated peaceful protest as a way to advance the nationalist cause. Through nonviolent acts such as the Salt March of 1930, in which thousands of people marched 240 miles with Gandhi to protest the British tax on salt, the Empire finally gave in. India was granted independence in 1947, though the triumphant moment was sullied when the British partitioned the country into a Muslim territory, Pakistan, in the north, and a Hindu territory in the south. The partition caused one of the largest migrations in world history, as residents in both locations fled to escape violent conditions.

The Road Ahead

Since becoming a self-governing nation, India has seen its share of tragedy. The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 caused genocide and a refugee crisis before creating the independent nation of Bangladesh. President Indira Gandhi was violently assassinated in 1984, as was her son Rajiv in 1991. More recently, a series of terrorist attacks in 2008 rocked the capital city of Mumbai. Today the country faces overcrowding, inequality, and environmental destruction.

Even with its violent modern history and current challenges, India is viewed as a rising nation. Its youthful population has grown the economy and improved employment opportunities. The future of India will depend on its ability to meet the needs of its growing urban centers, improve infrastructure such as water and sanitation services, and increase the transparency and efficiency of government. ✳

Modern India is home to some of the world's largest and most crowded cities, with a national population of more than one billion people.

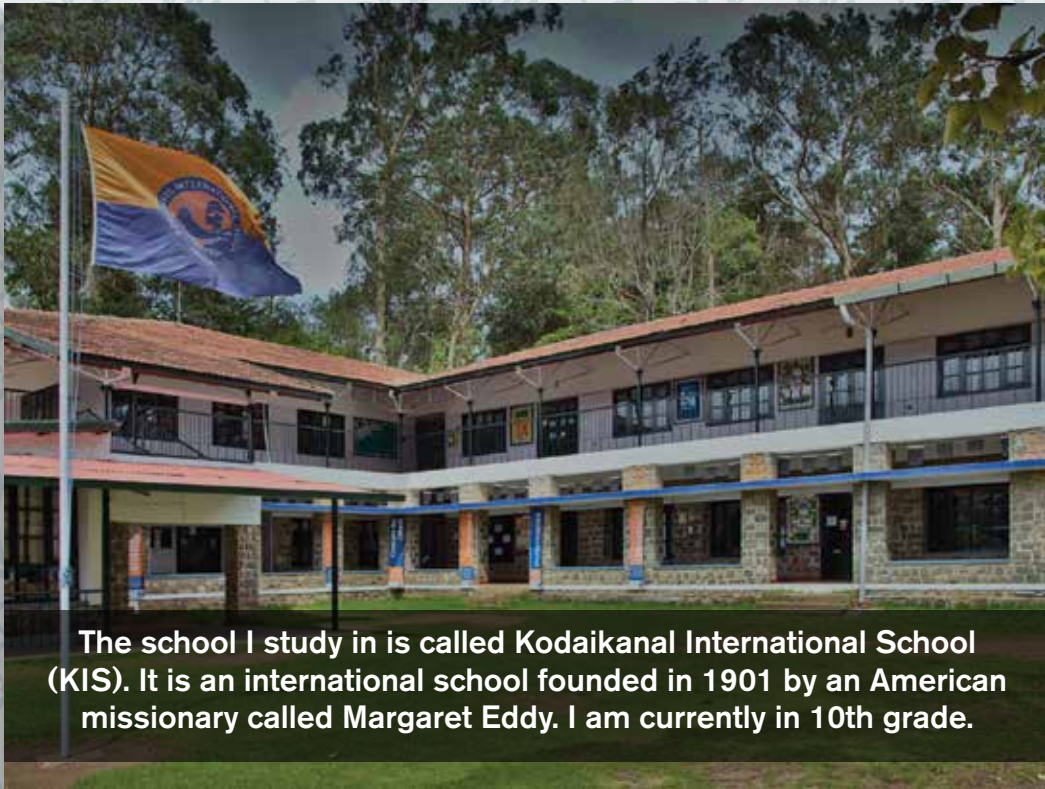

Becoming modern India

PRASHANT'S SCHOOL LIFE

The school I study in is called Kodaikanal International School (KIS). It is an international school founded in 1901 by an American missionary called Margaret Eddy. I am currently in 10th grade.

Subject: School Life

I study history, math, biology, chemistry, physics, English, French, PE, computer technology, violin/orchestra, art, and world religion. My favorite subjects are: PE, history, biology, and English. My least favorite are computer technology and math. Over the day we have several teachers, each teaching one subject. Our school has two football [soccer] fields (also used for track and field) and one field for discus, shot put, javelin, high jump, and long jump. We also have three basketball/indoor football courts.

Probably the best times I have in school are during Field Day, which is when our school has a track and field tournament. We are divided into 3 houses (orange, blue, and white) and compete in many events. It is the biggest thing in our school and all students participate in at least 1 event.

PRASHANT'S SCHOOL LIFE

To: The Reader

Subject: My Schedule

Our school day is more than 8 hours long. We have 8 periods (45 min) with 1 hour of lunch in between and 15 minutes of tea break after second period. We go to school at 7:50 for homeroom before starting first period at 8:10. School finishes at 4:40 but there are many afterschool activities like track and field practice, football practice, drama, film club, Model United Nations [another MUN event is shown below], and several after school clubs, as well as helping the local community, which is part of our social experience programs.

Subject: My School Life

Our school has a field trip week where each class goes to a different place to do things. We usually do things to help the community we visit, for example: on one field trip we hiked across the state borders from our home state of Tamil Nadu to Kerala (left) and then visited villages where we will help the communities. We sometimes build houses or educate them. We also do fun things on our field trips, like go to malls or waterparks.

From 1st to 4th grade our school has the normal kind of field trip, which is for a few hours to the museum (right) or to see many local places like the cheese factory or local forests. But the middle and high school field trips are more about learning and gaining an understanding of other ways of life as well as enjoying ourselves in a new place.

Overall I like my school. It is a very unique school because it has people from all over the world. However there are no boundaries between people. We all live together and we are all friends. Unlike most schools, in our school almost everyone is friends. We are able to all get along no matter what social class you are in. Even the most popular people sometimes are very close to the lowest and least popular people.

TiME TO EAT!

To: The Reader

Subject: My Favorite Food

My favorite food is dosa or what we call "meals."

Dosa is kind of like a crepe but much larger and a little crunchy. It is not usually eaten sweet and instead is eaten with sambar, which is a kind of yellow liquidy thing that you can dip your food in or pour it on top.

Meals (dosa) is something you can get in a restaurant and is commonly served at lunch. As a typical Indian, I have an enormous appetite. That is why meals is such a great choice. It is usually about 100 rupees (approximately a $1.50) and comes with rice, aplam (a fried crisp about half a foot in diameter), fried okra, sambar, and rassam (which is more liquidy than sambar and has a bit more spice), yogurt, along with a few more toppings for the rice and 2 different desserts. In total there will be 1 bowl of rice, aplam, and about 9 small bowls of each of these things. And the best part is that you have unlimited rice.

Prashant

My Food Day

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My typical breakfast is cereal and a scrambled egg, which I usually have with chili sauce. I only cook breakfasts. I can make pancakes and many different types of eggs. My favorite is frying the egg on top of a slice of bread.

For lunch, our school always has something different and from a different country. But at home it would be about the same as dinner. For dinner, I eat rice and chapatti (kind of like the wrapping of a burrito) with chicken curry and some vegetable. The food is always spicy.

When my friends and I go out, we usually eat at a restaurant. Sometimes we eat pizza or kati rolls, (left) which is a thing it my town, kind of like a burrito with beef and mayo. There is also a great place to eat fried chicken here–it's not as good as KFC but the chicken tastes very similar and is spicy. One of my friend's uncles also owns this great place called Ten Degrees. It is probably the best restaurant in my town and serves great food, but it's not a place with Indian food, it's more of a fancy restaurant. When we have enough pocket money, we sometimes go there for a good meal.

Indian Culture

With its vast population, deep and diverse history, and wide range of regional differences, India has a unique and vibrant culture. A traveler will find differences in art, music, dance, cuisine, and language from place to place, though all are informed by a shared past and many common influences. The influence of religion, for instance, is widespread: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism were all founded in India and continue to shape the nation's cultural life. These ancient traditions exist alongside such modern cultural expressions as the "Bollywood" film industry, which is bigger than Hollywood and produces hundreds of Hindi-language films each year.

Words to Understand

artisan   people skilled at making things by hand

ghee   a type of clarified butter used in Indian cooking, made by removing butter's liquid components

While many Westerners think of "Indian" food as all the same, in India, the cuisine can vary greatly from state to state or region to region.

Cuisine

Indian cuisine is characterized by its bold flavors and liberal use of spices, including cumin, turmeric, cinnamon, and dried hot pepper. The northern, southern, eastern, and western parts of the country all have unique "takes" on the national cuisine. Northern dishes tend to have more dairy-based gravies, made with ingredients such as milk or **ghee**, while coconuts are a main component in dishes of the south. The east is known for sweet desserts such as sandesh, a milk-and-sugar-based confection. Fish is very popular in the west.

Some staples of Indian cooking include rice and pulses. These are edible seeds such as beans, peas, and lentils that can be used in stews or soups, or even ground into flour and made into pancakes called *dosa*. In the north, it is common to eat meals with a type of flatbread known as *naan*.

The many cultures that have occupied India throughout the years have influenced its cuisine. The Mughals introduced the use of dried fruits, almonds, and heavy creams in dishes; years later, the British introduced tea, which became one of India's most popular beverages. It is often blended with milk, cinnamon, and other spices to create a beverage called *masala chai*.

Literary Traditions

In addition to the Vedas, the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, two epic poems have had a profound influence on world culture: the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Ramayana* follows the journey of Lord Rama, a warrior-prince, as he battles to rescue his wife, Sita. The *Mahabharata* tells the story of two families locked in a struggle for power. Both were written in Sanskrit, though it is difficult to date precisely when, and both explore philosophical and moral ideas of how people should approach their lives.

Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, novelist, songwriter, and visual artist from the Indian state of Bengal who carried the traditions of Indian literature into the modern era. In 1913, he became the first person of Asian descent to win the Nobel Prize. In addition to his many literary achievements, he established an alternative university, composed the

Indian women model the traditional sari. Many women also wear veils or a sort of half-shirt. Jewelry, especially bracelets, is also very popular.

national anthems of three countries, and produced some 2,500 paintings and drawings that helped change the course of Bengali art.

Clothing

Clothing is a distinct part of Indian culture. What people wear may vary by region, climate, and whether they are from a rural or urban area. In general, women favor a long, flowing garment known as a *sari*. A sari is a single piece of cloth that is wrapped around the waist and draped over the body. Saris come in a variety of colors and patterns. Men usually opt for a *dhoti*, a rectangular piece of fabric that is tied at the waist and covers the legs. *Kurtas*, knee-length shirts, can be worn on all occasions.

Very stylized and methodical, the Bharatanatyam *style of dance is from the southern part of the country and often is used to retell Hindu stories.*

Sikhism is one of India's main religions. Both male and female Sikhs are required to wear a *dastaar*, a type of turban. The headgear serves to cover the Sikh's hair, which he or she is not supposed to cut out of respect for God's creation.

The Art of Dance

Dance has deep roots in Indian culture: Ancient Hindu texts estimated to be from 200 BCE contain instructions on the art form. Regional folk dances are popular at weddings or other celebratory events, and Indian "Bollywood" films make extensive use of dance.

There are several classical Indian dance forms. *Bharatanatyam* originated as a Hindu temple dance in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Dancers use movements to interpret the legends, themes, and devotional ideals of

Hinduism. They are accompanied by musicians and singers. *Kathakali* traces its roots to the state of Kerala in southwestern India. Performers are traditionally male and wear elaborate costumes and masks, and their movements reflect the themes of Hindu folk tales and epic poems such as the *Ramayana*.

Less formal are the many folk dances of India. *Bhangra* originated during the spring harvest season in the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. Men would perform lively steps to welcome the reaping of new crops. They would traditionally dance in a circle to the rhythm of a drum called a *dhol* while a singer sang folk songs. By the 1940s and 50s, *bhangra* became popular outside the Punjab region. Performers added new instruments,

Bhangra *dancers move very quickly to a fast-paced rhythm. The popular style is often seen in shows and has spread far beyond its Punjab roots.*

including guitars and saxophones, and changed the subjects of the songs to incorporate modern themes.

Architecture

Described by Rabindranath Tagore as "a teardrop on the cheek of eternity," India's most famous architectural landmark is undoubtedly the Taj Mahal. Located in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, it was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a final resting place for his wife. It was completed in 1653. The Taj Mahal is not a single building, but a 42-acre complex with a mosque, gardens, and guest quarters. An estimated 20,000 **artisans** were involved in its construction.

The massive Taj Mahal is probably the most famous single place in all of India. Built as a tomb for a leader's wife, it attracts millions of visitors each year.

Women who lived in the Hawa Mahal in Jaipur could never leave, but they could watch the world through the 953 windows of this famous palace.

Another famous building is the Hawa Mahal in the northwest state of Rajasthan, built in 1799. Known as the "Palace of the Breeze," it is in reality a giant, ornate sandstone wall with more than 950 windows. It was designed as a place for royal women to be able to watch the activities of the street below without having to appear in public. ✴

Indian dance and music

PRASHANT'S TOWN

To: The Reader

Subject: My Town

In the middle of my town is a large lake, which is the central point of the Five Hills of Kodaikanal. This results in the lake resembling the shape of a hand. The lake is about 4.5 km (2.7 miles) in circumference and many people enjoy fishing, cycling, horse riding, and rowing.

The large number of forests in Kodai, as well as the rivers and waterfalls, have always been great tourist attractions.

The wildlife in Kodaikanal is also very amazing. Kodaikanal is somewhat of a wildlife sanctuary and is inhabited by many endangered species. This includes the Indian gaur (below), a bison-like animal that is much larger than the American bison and can grow to almost six feet tall. Many show up near our houses and the people of Kodai coexist with them. We also have some elephants, tigers, leopards, deer, and bears, though they never come into the main town and can only be found in the outskirts.

Indian Rock Python

Indian Customs

Most Indian customs revolve around faith and family. Religious rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations mark the cycles of the seasons for believers of different backgrounds. The relationship between the extended family is just as important as the immediate one, and multiple generations of a family often live together. With its ancient roots, history and tradition are much respected in India. Sometimes this can appear old-fashioned or even **regressive** to Westerners, especially with institutions such as the **caste system** or arranged marriages.

Words to Understand

caste system   a system of social order in India that divides people into different classes from birth

henna   a reddish-brown dye obtained from the powdered leaves of a tropical plant, used to decorate the body

quota   a fixed amount of something that a group or person is entitled to

regressive   something that does not move forward, but returns to a previous state

Though the government and local groups are trying to lessen the impact of castes, the system remains a big part of Indian society. These women are Brahmins.

The Caste System

In Indian society, the family you are born into determines a lot about your future. This is because of the caste system, an ancient Hindu form of social classification. There are four main caste groups: the Brahmins are priests and teachers, believed to come from the head of Brahma, the Hindu god of creation; the Kshatriyas are warriors and property owners, who sprung from Brahma's arms; the Vaishyas are merchants from Brahma's thighs; and the Sudras are workers, who came from Brahma's feet. There is a fifth class, the "Untouchables" or Achhoots, who exist outside the main caste system and perform menial tasks.

Over the centuries, the caste system became a part of Indian life. It even affected non-Hindus. This led to segregation between upper and lower castes; a Brahmin could not accept food from a person of a lower caste, for

Namasté

Namasté (NAH-mahs-tay) is an ancient Hindu greeting that is widely used in India, Nepal, and elsewhere on the subcontinent. To perform the greeting, a person puts his or her hands together with thumbs near the chest, makes a slight bow, and speaks the word *namasté*, which means "I bow to the divine in you." The greeter shows that he or she is willing to put ego aside and honor another person's presence.

instance, and if an Untouchable drank from a well it was considered polluted.

In the 20th century, there were actions taken against the dominance of caste in Indian society. When India became independent, the government made laws to protect those of lower caste, including Untouchables. It also established **quotas** to make sure all people had access to government jobs and education. Even with these advances, caste remains a deep part of Indian identity.

Marriage Customs

The importance of marriage is a long-established Indian custom. A very common practice is for parents to arrange marriages for their children. A young man is considered old enough to marry at 21, especially if he has a steady job and solid source of income. A young woman should be at least 18. Parents search for ideal matches for their children based on religion, caste and regional background, profession, and sometimes horoscope.

Once a match is made, preparations for the wedding can begin. The bride's family will transfer a dowry (money, property, or other goods) to the bridegroom's family. In the weeks before the wedding there are engagement parties and rituals such as *Barni Bandhwana*, where thread is tied to the hands of the groom and his parents and family members pray for a safe wedding.

The wedding celebration typically lasts for three days. The first day is a small gathering with only the couple and close relatives. The second day begins with a special *mehndi* ceremony where the bride and her female friends receive **henna** designs on their hands and feet, and ends with a big party called a *sangeet*. Families and friends participate in dances and perform skits for the couple.

The official ceremony takes place on the third day. In traditional Hindu weddings, the groom will arrive on horseback surrounded by his family and friends and accompanied by the beat of a drum. Another custom is the *Mangal Phera*, in which the couple walks around a fire four times to symbolize the four major hopes in life: Dharma (duty to family and God), Artha (prosperity), Kama (love for life), and Moksha (spiritual freedom).

Prior to the actual marriage ceremony, Hindu brides are often decorated with henna decorations, a temporary artwork created using plant dye.

The annual celebration of Diwali is highlighted with many lights—often simple clay-pot candles such as these— in homes and public places.

Diwali

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, is a five-day celebration that takes place every autumn. It has its origins in the ancient harvest festivals of India, when people would ask for blessings at the end of the harvest season. Different parts of the country associate the holiday with different Hindu deities such as Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. It is the country's biggest holiday, and Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs celebrate alongside Hindus.

The name *Diwali* comes from words that mean "row of lights." During Diwali, Indians illuminate their homes with clay lanterns and setting off fireworks. These many lights symbolize the divine light of God and its triumph over darkness.

Each of the five days of Diwali has a special focus. The first day is devoted to cleaning the home; the second day is for the lighting of the lamps; the third day is reserved for prayer and sharing a family meal; the fourth day is a time to make the rounds visiting relatives; and the fifth day is when brothers pay a special visit to their sisters.

Celebrating Diwali

Muslim Holidays

Eid al-Fitr is an important holiday for Muslims everywhere, including India. It comes at the end of Ramadan, the annual month of fasting in Islam. Muslims everywhere celebrate with friends and family by exchanging gifts, purchasing new clothes, and participating in special prayer services.

Indian and Pakistani Muslims begin their Eid al-Fitr festivities the day before, on what is known as Chaand Raat, or the "Night of the Moon." People gather outdoors to look for the new moon, which marks the official start to Eid al-Fitr. They visit malls and grocery stores to do their shopping for the holiday and begin preparing tasty delicacies like *sivayyan* (or *seviyan*), a sweet dish made with noodles and fruit. ✳

Purification rituals are part of the end of Ramadan, marked by the Eid-al-Fitr festivities.

PRASHANT'S FREE TIME

I ENJOY FOOTBALL!

Subject: My Free Time

My sister and I play a lot of sports. I especially enjoy football [soccer], and track and field. I mostly run long distance as well as 400m and 800m. I do a lot of hiking which is a part of the school outdoors program, and play the violin.

We don't often spend evenings out in town since there aren't many places to go. During the school day, we hang out a lot together and on weekends we may spend time at a friend's house playing video games or football.

During the vacation, we often have sleepovers lasting several days, during which we watch lots of movies and play video games for hours! But we also play a lot of football and we also play capture the flag on school campus, with a little parkour (a fitness exercise, below left) involved. My friends and I often take our bicycles on long rides outside of the main town. There are many roads through the forests and we enjoy riding there.

PRASHANT'S FREE TIME

We enjoy all of the Hollywood movies but some enjoy Tamil and Hindi movies. I like a few Tamil movies but I mostly watch Hollywood. We watch a lot of TV shows. I personally love How I Met Your Mother and Game of Thrones.

I LOVE GAME OF THRONES

Chennai is also a good place to go to the beach where I enjoy swimming.

Cochin is better for shopping and enjoying the unique food.

Bangalore is the best for food since there is a lot of variety.

Indian Economy and Politics

The year 2016 was a key moment for India's economy. In February, it edged out China for the title of the world's fastest-growing economy, a position experts predict it will hold for the next several years. Then in December, the size of its economy surpassed that of Great Britain to become the sixth largest in the world. Considering that Great Britain was the colonizing power in India not so long ago, this period of growth is all the more dramatic.

Words to Understand

bicameral   a legislative body with two branches

diversify   to give variety to something

information technology   the creation and use of computer systems to store, process, and transmit electronic data

subsistence farming   an agricultural method where farmers grow only what they need to support themselves and their families

A large, educated, and mostly English-speaking workforce, plus the country's lower cost of living, has created millions of jobs in IT and customer service.

IT India

India is a place where ancient industries such as textile weaving and **subsistence farming** exist alongside the latest careers in **information technology** (IT) and computer science. India's role as a worldwide information technology provider dates back to the late 1960s with the formation of Tata Consultancy Services, a software development and IT consulting firm. In 1991, the Indian government removed regulations to make it easier for foreign companies to do business in India. The government also set up a system of satellite links that allowed Indian IT firms to transmit their work around the world.

Digital India

The Indian government launched yet another major plan to improve digital connectivity throughout the nation in 2015. Digital India is a widespread campaign to bring Internet access to rural areas, make government services such as mobile healthcare available to people online, and provide IT training programs. Critics of Digital India say the program focuses too much on technology and economic growth rather than addressing inequality, illiteracy, and other challenges. Critics also worry about the collection of personal information by the government or corporations, and question whether improved Internet access will truly strengthen democracy.

Progress continued when the government set up a special "task force" to evaluate and improve technological capability in 1999. The investment paid off as the Indian IT sector grew. India acquired a global reputation for highly skilled workers, efficient service, and innovation. The Information Technology Act of 2000 made it legal to sign documents and conduct other transactions electronically, enabling India to launch into 21st century digital commerce.

Today, India boasts several "tech hubs"—cities with a high concentration of IT and software development professionals. The city of Bangalore is often called the "Silicon Valley of India" for its many computer-related businesses. A new generation of young entrepreneurs, improved Internet access, and greater availability of laptops and mobile phones are all signs that India's IT sector will continue to grow.

Agricultural Challenges

India ranks fourth in the world in terms of total agricultural output. It is the world's largest producer of milk and spices, and the second-largest producer of sugar, rice, and wheat. Most households in rural areas are dependent on some form of agriculture to earn a living.

In the 1960s, a worldwide movement known as the "Green Revolution" helped combat hunger in impoverished areas through the use of new

agricultural technologies like disease-resistant seeds, chemical fertilizers, and improved irrigation systems. The Green Revolution saved the lives of hundreds of millions of people, though it left a legacy of environmental damage: water shortages, greenhouse gas emissions, and poor soil quality due to over-cultivation and excessive use of pesticides all plague Indian farmers today.

The initial burst of productivity brought on by the Green Revolution has slowed over the past two decades. Experts advocate **diversifying** crops so that farmers can have more options to grow and sell, as well as make farms better able to deal with adverse weather conditions such as drought. The government has taken steps to improve the efficiency of water irrigation, especially the practice of "micro-irrigation" (or drip irrigation), where a system of tubes feeds water directly to the roots of plants.

Farming on an industrial level has not reached very deeply into India. Most farms are still worked by hand, as on this rice paddy.

Delegates of the Bharatiya Janata (Indian People's) Party gather in November at a national convention in Bombay.

The Parliamentary System

With more than 1.2 billion people, India is the world's most populous democracy. Officially it is a federal republic, meaning that it is made up of different states and territories. In India there are 29 states and seven union territories. The states have their own governments to deal with local issues, while the central government retains authority over the union territories.

India has a parliamentary system of government, so the executive branch receives its authority from a legislative body called parliament. India's parliament is **bicameral**, with two houses: Rajya Sabha, the Council of States, and Lok Sabha, the House of the People. Members of Rajya Sabha are elected by state assemblies for six-year terms, while members of Lok Sabha are elected directly by the citizens for five-year terms.

In addition to the legislative and executive branches, India's government has a judicial branch that interprets the constitution and upholds the nation's laws. The Supreme Court is the highest level of the judicial branch. It oversees all cases between the central government and the states, as well as cases between individual states or union territories.

Leadership Positions

India's parliament elects the president every five years. The president is the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He or she has the power to force parliament to meet, tp declare states of emergency, and to dissolve Lok Sabha under certain conditions.

The president appoints a prime minister, who usually comes from the majority party of parliament. The prime minister is the head of government and chief advisor to the president, and is responsible for the daily operations of the executive branch. He or she is in charge of selecting members for the Council of Ministers, a group of members of parliament that make high-level governmental decisions.

There are three levels in the Council of Ministers: cabinet ministers, ministers of state, and junior ministers. Examples of ministry positions in India include Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, and Minister of Defense. Together, the prime minister and the cabinet ministers are known as the Union Cabinet. ✳
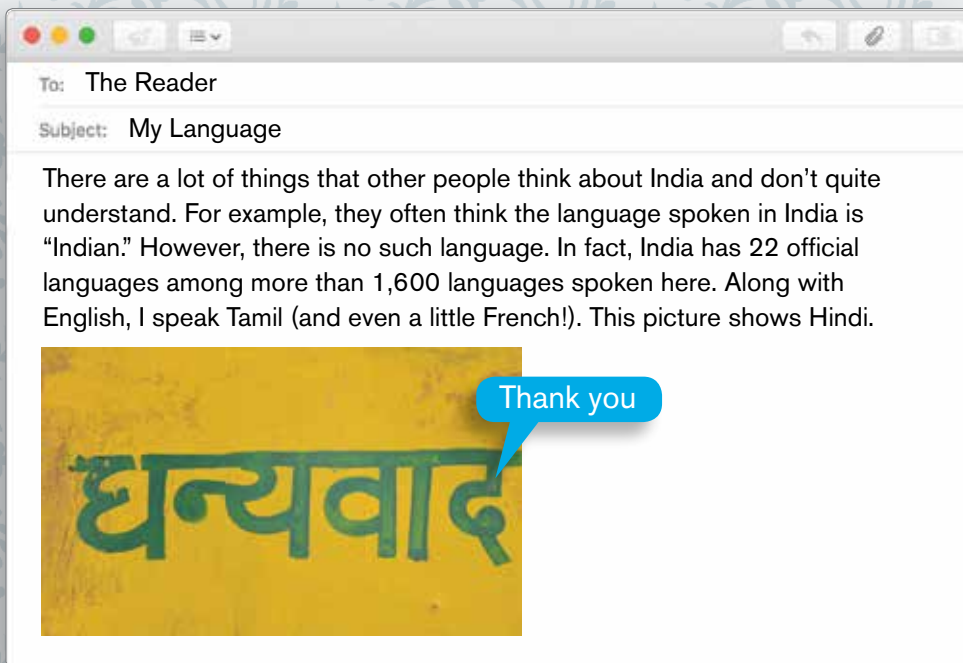
PRASHANT'S COUNTRY

To: The Reader

Subject: My Country

I think India is a great place, and there are a lot of great things about it. Though there are a few problems with the way the country functions, India has come a long way and is slowly fixing many of the problems.

[In 2016,] India took a very big leap towards bettering its economy. In an attempt to get rid of the black [counterfeit] money circulating around, they nullified [canceled] the value of all 500 and 1,000 rupee notes. All of India had to exchange a lot of their money for new notes that have trackers inside them (below). They also count the money that a single person turns in to figure out whether it is black money or not, based on their income. I think this was a great thing, and though it may have inconvenienced a lot of people, it was a great way to get back all the black money.

To: The Reader

Subject: My Language

There are a lot of things that other people think about India and don't quite understand. For example, they often think the language spoken in India is "Indian." However, there is no such language. In fact, India has 22 official languages among more than 1,600 languages spoken here. Along with English, I speak Tamil (and even a little French!). This picture shows Hindi.

धन्यवाद

Thank you

Language in India

More than 800 languages are spoken in India. Most are dialects of major languages and spoken by smaller population groups. The national government recognizes two official national languages: Hindi and English. There are also 22 state languages.

- Assamese,
- Bengali
- Bodo
- Dogri
- Gujarati
- Kannada
- Kashmiri
- Konkani
- Maithili
- Malayalam
- Manipuri
- Marathi
- Meitei
- Nepali
- Oriya
- Punjabi
- Sanskrit
- Santhali
- Sindhi
- Tamil
- Telugu
- Urdu

PRASHANT'S FAITH

To: The Reader

Subject: My Faith

Religion plays an important role in my life. I study in a Christian school and have been a Christian all my life. My whole family is Christian. I go to church almost every Sunday. I learn about Christianity in school alongside many other religions from around the world. However, I have always been quite fascinated by the Indian religions like Hinduism. It is one of the few polytheistic religions that are still largely practiced and has a lot of interesting views on human beings and the choices we make. I see it as a very interesting religion since it focuses less on doing good because god commands you to or you will be punished, and more on doing good to make others happy and making your life better. It also focuses on respect and caring for each other and I also really enjoy the Hindu folktales like the Ramayana.

Hinduism

As a Christian, Prashant is in the minority in India. Christians make up less than three percent of the population. About 80 percent of Indians are Hindu, with Muslims making up about 14 percent.

The split of the British Indian colony in 1947 into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan (and later Muslim Bangladesh) made Hindus the dominant faith in India.

Hinduism does not have a specific founder or starting point. In fact, it was not even called Hinduism until British rulers needed a single name for what was a diverse collection of traditions. Instead it grew over many centuries as a collection of spiritualities and beliefs of people around the region. Over time, it has coalesced into beliefs that include a belief in rebirth and the idea that the divine is found in many things. Most Hindu sects believe in a variety of gods or at least versions of gods, such as Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesh, and others.

The Future of India

India is a place of extremes, and the view of its future is no different. On the one hand, India is home to a rapidly growing economy, a vibrant young workforce (India is slated to become the world's youngest country by 2020), and a foreign policy that has cultivated strong relationships with nations around the world. On the other hand, despite economic gains, poverty remains an issue: one-fifth of Indians in urban areas live on less than a dollar a day, while data shows more than 200 million people in rural areas—a fifth of the rural population—were living below the official poverty line. Addressing these inequalities and making opportunities more accessible to all is an important step in India's future.

Words to Understand

array   a large group of something

graft   to acquire money dishonestly, such as through bribery

gross domestic product   the total value of a country's goods and services

transparency   the state of being clear; in government, relating to the idea of information that is open and accessible to the public

universalize   to make something available to everyone

India's railroads are a vital lifeline across the country, which does not have a road network that is nearly as complete or well-maintained as the rails.

Improving Transportation

The population boom in India raises a whole **array** of potential challenges. Urban areas are expected to grow to 590 million people by 2030, a huge increase for cities that are already straining to meet the needs of their populations.

Affordable housing, efficient transportation, and ways of curbing pollution are all things that will need to be addressed in the coming years. The government has pushed for the expansion of rapid transit systems, such as the metro systems already found in Kolkata, Delhi, and several other cities. The eventual goal is to have metro systems in at least 50 cities across the country.

Storage and Transport

Related to the problem of mass transit in urban areas is the need for better infrastructure in rural communities so that farmers can get their produce to market. Vegetables and fruits need to be stored properly and transported quickly so they do not spoil. In many places in rural India, systems of storage and transport are inefficient, leading to waste, fewer selling opportunities, and higher prices for consumers.

In addition to easing congestion and reducing travel times, metro transit can improve public health by cutting down on harmful auto emissions and reducing the amount of traffic fatalities overall. The World Health Organization reports that 10 percent of the world's auto fatalities occur in India, and India's Ministry of Road Transport and Highways states that a life is lost every 3.7 minutes due to traffic-related accidents.

Education

India's emerging young workforce is an asset to the country, but it is crucial that it gets proper education and training. India's education system has had some recent successes, such as a rise in the literacy rate by nine percent between 2001 and 2011. But some residents and government officials say that more must be done to prepare students for employment. According to a 2015 survey of Indian teachers, 57 percent of students may lack the skills necessary to enter the workforce.

One problem is the inequality of school systems across the country. Parents who can afford to send their children to private English schools often do, leaving public schools underfunded. Many villages in rural areas lack sufficient schools and battle high dropout rates.

The Indian government has taken steps to make schools more equal. Initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan ("Education for All Movement") has been in operation since 2000, working to **universalize** education for children between ages 6 and 14. In addition to building new schools, the

government program aims to update school infrastructure with things such as clean drinking water and toilet facilities—things that American students might take for granted, but that may be lacking in Indian schools.

Transparency

A majority of Indian voters—especially younger ones—say they want the government to weed out corruption and make **transparency** a priority in the years to come. The Indian government currently faces many accusations of corruption, including **graft**, purposeful obstruction of information, and other scandals: In 2008, government officials sold telecommunications rights to mobile phone companies at a fraction of the price, which ended up costing the country $39 billion. Another $33 billion was lost in 2012 when the government sold coal fields to public and private investors without allowing competitive bidding.

The problem of corruption threatens India's economy by making the country less attractive to foreign businesses. It negatively affects the poor through illegal practices like bribery and damages peoples' trust in their officials. The Indian government has taken some steps to reduce corruption, such as an act passed in 2005 that allows citizens to view public records. In

Narendra Modi was elected the 14th prime minister of India in 2014.

2011, courts throughout the country began the process of "fast-tracking" corruption-related cases so they could be settled quickly.

A series of protests and demonstrations across the country in 2011 helped advance the anticorruption cause. The state elections of 2013 saw the rise of the anticorruption Aam Aadmi Party, while other leaders began to advocate for more honest government in the future.

The Health Crisis

A lack of accessible, affordable health care has become a crisis in India, and one that the country will have to address soon. As recently as 2014, India was spending less than one percent of its **gross domestic product** on health care, leaving massive shortages of hospitals, doctors, and lab

Just as the Hindu celebration of Holi showers a myriad of colors on revelers, the many parts of India—ethnic groups, faiths, languages—merge to form a whole.

technicians. Based on data from the World Health Organization, India is currently short 500,000 doctors to adequately care for the needs of its growing population.

A lack of public health infrastructure has led to some great tragedies, such as children being turned away from hospitals that don't have enough beds, or the statistic that 80 percent of Indians with dengue fever—a mosquito-borne virus that can cause illness and death—go untreated. Wealthier states tend to have better health services than poorer states, creating inequalities across the nation.

Government officials have proposed solutions to the health care crisis, including building more medical schools. However, the high costs of medical degrees can force many graduates to take jobs in private hospitals where they can earn more, rather than find positions in understaffed public hospitals.

Conclusion

Many of the challenges that will face us as a planet in the coming century—from climate change to labor rights, income inequality to accessible health care, overpopulation to the development of a digital economy—can all be found in India. As India ascends to the status of a world superpower, it has the potential to lead the way in solving many of these problems. This will require addressing pressing issues of poverty, gender discrimination, and unemployment so as to unlock the full potential of India's population. Yet with its deep history, religious and cultural diversity, and strong sense of family and place, India has many advantages to create a thriving society. ✳

India's future

TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

1. What was the name of the first civilization in what is now India?

2. What group controlled most of India in the 19th century?

3. In Indian food, what are pulses?

4. What is called "India's most famous architectural landmark"?

5. Name two of the four main traditional caste groups in India.

6. What is the name of the five-day Hindu celebration also shared by other faiths?

7. Name one of the areas that the text says will be a big challenge for India in the future.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Research an emperor from one of the ruling dynasties of India, such as the Gupta or Mughal Empire. Discover when he lived, how he governed, and notable developments that happened while he was in power. Write a brief biographical sketch summarizing your findings.

2. Pretend you are preparing a meal for your Indian guests. Plan a menu with at least three items that you wish to serve. Note what you will need to purchase from the grocery store and any special preparation instructions.

3. Research one of the Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or Jain holidays celebrated in India. Write a brief report summarizing the significance of the holiday, where it is celebrated, and any special traditions associated with it.

4. Research one of the individual states or union territories of India. Find out where it is located, its population and area, and other significant facts. Write a brief report giving an overview of the state or territory, being sure to include its main contributions to the Indian economy.

FIND OUT MORE

Books

Dalrymple, William. *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857*. New York: Vintage, 2008.

Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.

Gandhi, Mohandas. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With Truth*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993.

Knott, Kim. *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Websites

www.ancientindia.co.uk
The British Museum maintains this informative site about the history of ancient India, including sections on writing, geography, early Hinduism, and others.

www.knowindia.gov.in
This "National Portal of India" has information on the culture, heritage, history, and territories of India, as well as photo galleries and updates on current events.

www.thehindu.com
The Hindu is one of the largest English-language newspapers in India. Its website is one place to review important news developments and issues affecting Indian citizens today.

Series Glossary of Key Terms

arable land   land suitable for cultivation and the growing of crops

commodity   a raw material that has value and is regularly bought and sold

cuisine   cooking that is characteristic of a particular country, region, or restaurant

destabilize   damage, disrupt, undermine

dynasties   long periods of time during which one extended family rules a place

industrialization   the process in which an economy is transformed from mainly agricultural to one based on manufacturing goods

infrastructure   buildings, roads, services, and other things that are necessary for a society to function

lunar calendar   a calendar based on the period from one moon to the next. Each cycle is 28 1/2 to 29 days, so the lunar year is about 354 days

parliamentary   describes a government in which a body of cabinet ministers is chosen from the legislature and act as advisers to the chief of state (or prime minister)

resonate   echo and reverberate; stay current through time

sovereignty   having supreme power and authority

venerate   treat with great respect

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Photo Credits

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Michael Centore is a writer and editor. He has helped produce many titles, including memoirs, cookbooks, and educational materials, for a variety of publishers. He has authored numerous books for Mason Crest, including titles in the Major Nations in a Global World and Drug Addiction and Recovery series. His work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books, Killing the Buddha, Mockingbird*, and other print- and web-based publications. He lives in Connecticut. (Thanks to Karis Mohl for her help in connecting us with Prashant.)