
I. THE COUNTRY

India covers an area of 3 287 782 km². It is the seventh largest country in the world and the second most populous with some 795 million people.

Located almost entirely within a peninsula in South Asia, India forms a natural subcontinent, flanked by the Himalayas in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south. Its neighbours are China and Nepal in the north, Pakistan in the northwest, and Burma, Bhutan and Bangladesh in the northeast. The mainland peninsula comprising the Ganga and Indus plains is irrigated by a vast system of rivers flowing from the Himalayan mountains and the Deccan Plateau.

The capital city of India is New Delhi, situated in the northwest. Other major cities are Bombay, on the western coast and India's largest commercial and financial centre; Calcutta, in the east and the country's most populous city; and Madras, on the southeastern coast.

History and Government

Indian civilization is one of the oldest in the world. It dates back to the Indus Valley civilization around 3000 B.C. Aryan migrations to the subcontinent took place from about 1500 B.C., and the resulting marriage of Aryan and indigenous cultures laid the foundations of Hindu tradition and society.

The first Indian empire across the entire north rose under Chandragupta Maurya. The Maurya empire reached its height under Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka, who ruled from 273 to 232 B.C., and by the first century B.C., the Mauryas had lost their power. Other empires rose and fell. During the Gupta empire which was in power in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., the arts and sciences flourished, and the period became known as the Golden Age of India.

Developments in southern India were markedly different from those in the north. The mighty empires of the north rarely ventured into the south. The south had its own dynasties and its own maritime trade relations with countries as far east as Indonesia and the Philippines.

A second long period of fragmentation of political entities existed until Muslim invasions of the subcontinent in the seventh century. The Muslim period lasted for some