

and may well consult an astrologer before making a major decision.

Religion plays a key role in the lives of most Indians, be they Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians or Jains. Though conflict occurs between religious groups, generally, people of different faiths live in harmony, each person proud of his or her religious beliefs, yet tolerant of others.

India's constitution recognizes two languages, Hindi and English, although there are 15 major languages

and over 1,600 dialects. Although Hindi is prevalent, most people believe that English is necessary for a good job, a high standard of living, and mobility. In the south of India where several regional minority languages are spoken, people favour English over Hindi because they believe it offers Indians equal opportunities. Although your Indian counterparts will likely be fluent in English, knowledge of the dominant local language would be helpful in establishing good rapport with the people of the region.

Traditions and Norms

Respect

The Indian tradition of obedience and deference to elders and other authority figures is inculcated at an early age. Children are taught to honour their parents. The grandfather or father, the highest authority in the household, commands the greatest respect. School-aged children revere their teachers. Later, as young adults entering the workforce, they show similar respect for their bosses.

Hospitality

Hospitality has always been associated with Indian culture. Indians extend a spontaneously warm and sincere welcome to guests, whether they be old friends or strangers. Indians expect the same hospitality from others. Canadians sometimes find Indian



hospitality overwhelming. There are, however, no negative intentions underlying the hospitality. Whenever possible, accept whatever is offered, be it a cup of tea or an invitation to dinner.

Cleanliness

Foreigners have accused Indians of double standards with regard to personal and public cleanliness. Although most Indians are fastidious about personal and household cleanliness, in public some follow the dictum, "Out of sight, out of mind." They may, for example, dump garbage in the street or spit the juice of chewed betle nut, *paan*, onto the streets and the walls of public buildings. Such behaviour is, however, not the accepted norm.