

UNDERSTANDING INDIAN CULTURE

If you are open-minded and accepting of India's cultures and the changes that have propelled the country into its

present state, you will discover opportunities to build meaningful partnerships.

***Unity in Diversity* ♦ ♦ ♦**

"Unity in Diversity", the creed of the common people, is one of the many paradoxes with which you will have to come to grips. India is a land of fabulous wealth and abject poverty, palaces and hovels, *sadhus* (saints) and scientists. It is a country where the sweet fragrance of incense mingles with the stench of sewage, where the rich and poor live side-by-side, and where rural villagers, steeped in ancient tradition, coexist with westernized urbanites. It is a place where individuals revere gods and goddesses, yet condone bride-burning. This country that brought Mahatma Gandhi

and his creed of non-violence to the world suffers from on-going communal violence.

Despite its outward appearance of infinite variety and diversity, there is an underlying unity among India's people which has held for ages and is strengthened whenever a common enemy threatens. In the last 200 years, new factors—a national government, a unified civil service, and a centralized judicial system—have begun to soften the edges of diversity, increasing people's sense of community.

***Indian Society* ♦ ♦ ♦**

India is a collectivist society which is caste- and class-conscious. The extended family, one of the pillars of Indian society, includes the father, mother, sons and daughters (with their husbands), and everyone else who is directly or indirectly related by marriage. Families provide members with identity and protection in return for lifelong loyalty. In most Indian families, the patriarchal head exercises strong moral authority over other members.

Indian society supports widely divergent lifestyles. Farmers plough fields in the countryside, using the bullock and single-furrow plough as their forefathers did 2,000 years ago, while scientists conduct complex experiments in one of the world's most sophisticated space programs. And yet each has a foot in the other's world. The peasant gets the weather forecast on a transistor radio; the scientist worships the image of the family god