

Summary: The Culture of India

India's Culture

The Taj Mahal is one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture in the world. Two important works of world literature came from India: the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. These epic poems tell about the growth of Hinduism. India has several styles of music. Each style is unique to a region. India makes more films each year than any other country.

India has 18 official languages, but Indians speak hundreds of other languages and dialects. Most languages come from one of two families: Indo-Aryan or Dravidian. The Indo-Aryan family includes almost all European languages. About 75 percent of northern and central Indians speak Indo-Aryan languages. About 25 percent of all Indians speak Dravidian languages. Dravidian was the language spoken centuries ago in India. As invaders moved north, Dravidian speakers moved south. Less than five percent of India's population speaks English. Because English is the language of business, government, and science, knowledge of English is considered valuable.

Religion and Family

Most people in India are Hindus. Some Hindus perform daily rituals to their gods. The caste system is still in place, but the system is less rigid than it was. Many Muslims who had been living in India moved to Pakistan and East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh. Today, 14 percent of Indians are Muslims.

Family is important to Indians. Parents choose a bride or groom for their children from a family of the same caste. A woman's parents may look at her potential mate's education, financial status, or horoscope to help them make a decision. When a woman marries, her parents must provide her with a dowry. As India modernizes, this is beginning to change.

A typical meal varies from region to region. In the south and east, a meal usually includes rice. In the north and northwest, people eat bread called *chapati*. Meals also include beans or lentils, vegetables, and yogurt. Meat is rarely eaten, either because it is forbidden by religion or because it is too expensive.

Before You Read

Find and circle each vocabulary word.

dialect *noun*, a regional variety of a language

dowry *noun*, money or property given by a bride to her new husband and his family

After You Read

REVIEW What is the importance of the *Mahabharata* to the culture of India? Underline the sentence that tells about the importance of the *Mahabharata* to Indian culture.

REVIEW What might parents in India consider when they choose a bride or groom for their child? Highlight the sentences that tell what Indian parents might consider when they choose a bride or groom for their child.