

## Section 1

# The Geography of India


 Setting a Purpose

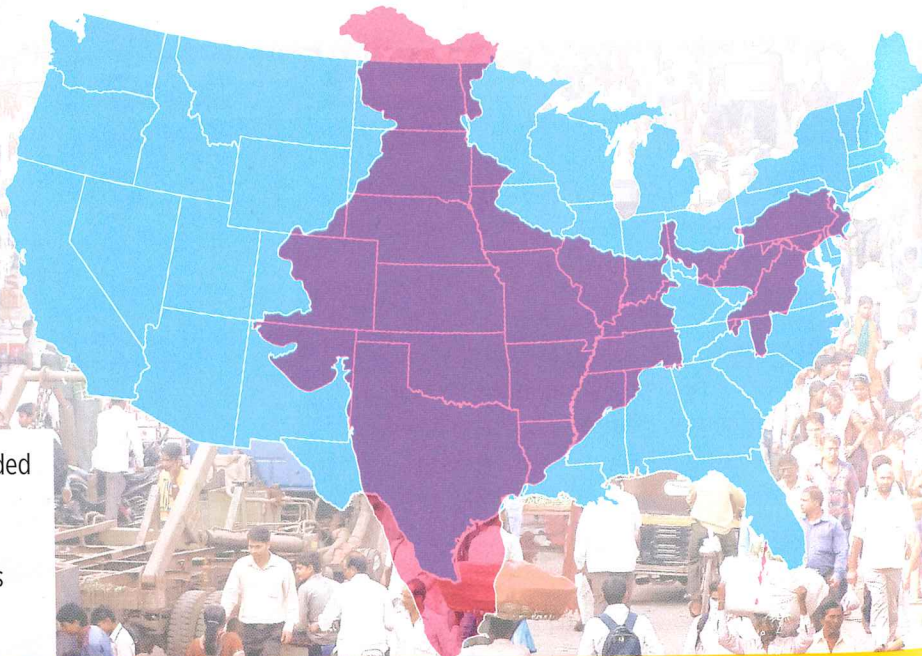
## As you read, look for

- ▶ population distribution in India;
- ▶ how the Himalayas have impacted the development of India;
- ▶ the impact of monsoons on India;
- ▶ causes and effects of environmental problems in India;
- ▶ terms: **subcontinent, monsoon, respiratory disease, Ganges Action Plan.**

## Location and Size of India

India is the largest country on the Indian subcontinent. It is located in southern Asia on the southern side of the Himalayan Mountains. India is located in the northern and eastern hemispheres and is crossed by the Tropic of Cancer. Along India's land border are six countries: Afghanistan (disputed by Pakistan), Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, and Pakistan. The island republic of Sri Lanka lies off the southern coast of India. India covers a large peninsula. Its 4,300 miles of coastline are on the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, all part of the Indian Ocean.

While India has one of the largest populations in the world, it is only the seventh-largest country in the world at about 1.2 million square miles. It is about one-third as large as the United States.



**Bottom:** This Mumbai street is crowded with shoppers. Mumbai (formerly Bombay) is the most populous city in the world's second most populous country.



## Physical Features of India

India is separated from the rest of Asia by three ranges of mountains: the Hindu Kush, the Himalayan, and the Karakoram ranges. Geographically, the country of India is on a **subcontinent** (a division of a continent) with features that make it unique from the rest of Asia. Just south of the large mountain ranges, most of India is made up of a broad plain between the Indus River and the Ganges River. The land in this plain is very fertile because the rivers provide tons of silt to enrich the soil. South of this great plain is an area of higher plateau called the Deccan Plateau. Even farther south, the land gives way to a narrow tropical strip along the coast of the Indian Ocean.

India's mountains, the Himalayas, have sometimes stopped invaders from the north who wanted access to India's fertile river valleys to the south. As a result, the culture of India has developed differently than the rest of Asia. At other times, however, invaders have been able to use natural passes through the mountains to make their way into the heart of India and establish new rulers and customs.

Most of India's people rely on farming and other agricultural work, so most of the people live along the great rivers and in the fertile river valleys.

Some of India's largest cities are located along the Ganges River or near the coast. The rivers provide transportation, trade routes, water for irrigation, and water to supply the people living in the cities. People are moving into cities from rural areas in large numbers looking for work and better opportunities for their families. The rivers have also become the easiest means of

disposing of human, animal, and industrial waste. As a result, nearly all of India's large cities have problems with overcrowding and air and water pollution.

## DID YOU KNOW ?

Millions of years ago, India was an island. It is on a different continental plate than the rest of Asia. The meeting of these continental plates has created the Himalayan Mountains.

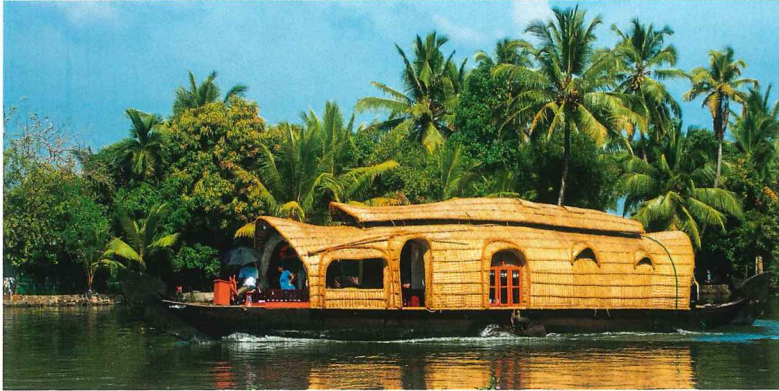
**Top:** The Khardung Pass in the Himalayas has been a route into India since ancient times and was part of historic caravan trails from Central Asia.

**Left:** The land and access to water make the paddy fields in India very productive. The country is among the world's top producers of rice.



## Climate

India has many types of climate. Snow and ice are in the northern mountains, hot dry plains are in the central plateau, and steamy tropical climate is along the southern coast. Along the mountain ranges to the north, the temperatures are like those in other high altitude locations. Some of the highest peaks are covered with glaciers and snow. A large desert area borders Pakistan, while the Ganges Plain is humid and almost tropical. The Deccan Plateau in the center of the country is more moderate, with a subtropical coastal plain along the Indian Ocean.



The climate of India is shaped by seasonal winds known as **monsoons**. These winds blow hot, dry air across the conti-

nent from the northeast during the winter. In the spring and summer, the winds come from the opposite direction and bring heavy rains from the ocean. These monsoon winds can be a blessing when they bring much-needed rain. On the other hand, monsoon rains can cause destructive flooding. The monsoons are very unpredictable. The people of India have to live their lives around these seasonal winds and rains. When the shifts in the weather are moderate, the Indian people are able to farm the rich river valley soil and use the rivers for transportation and trade.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

India has one of the largest and fastest-growing diamond cutting and polishing industries in the world.

## Natural Resources of India

India has many natural resources, a number of which are minerals. It is the fourth-largest producer of coal in the world. Some of India's other valuable mineral deposits include iron ore, manganese, bauxite, titanium, and diamonds. India also has deposits of natural gas and oil, which help supply their growing industries. Finally, India also has vast amounts of arable land.

## Environmental Issues

The large and densely populated parts of India create many environmental problems for India's people. There is the need for food and water, but there is also a need for clean ways to dispose of waste. Many of the industries and vehicles used by the people create pollution. The health of India's people will depend on good decisions on how to address these problems.

**Top:** A houseboat motors through the waters of Kerala, a tropical region known for monkeys, elephants, and tigers. **Right:** Productive coal mines make India the fourth-largest supplier of the world's coal.

