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Chapter 9

South Asia

Identifying the Boundaries

Of the world's seven continents, Asia is the largest. Its physical landscapes, political units, and ethnic groups are both wide-ranging and many. Besides Russia, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia, which have been addressed in previous lessons, Asian regions include South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.

South Asia extends south from the main part of the continent to the **Indian Ocean**. The principal boundaries of South Asia are the Indian Ocean, the **Himalayas**, and Afghanistan. The **Arabian Sea** borders Pakistan and India to the west, and the **Bay of Bengal** borders India and Bangladesh to the east. The western boundary is the desert region where Pakistan shares a border with Iran.

The realm was the birthplace of two of the world's great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, but there are also immense Muslim populations and large groups of followers of various other religions as well. Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism are the top three religions of South Asia. While Pakistan and Iran are both Islamic republics, each represents a significant branch of that faith; Iran is predominantly Shia, and Pakistan is mostly Sunni. Religious differences are also evident on the eastern border of the realm, where Bangladesh and India share a border with Myanmar. Bangladesh is mainly a Muslim country, while most in India align themselves with Hinduism. In Myanmar, most follow Buddhist traditions. In addition, Sikhism is a major religion in the Punjab region, which is located on India's northern border with Pakistan.

Figure 9.1 Main Features of South Asia



Source: Updated from map courtesy of University of Texas Libraries, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/txu-oclc-247232986-asia_pol_2008.jpg.

The countries of South Asia include Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Maldives. The Himalayas, separating South Asia from East Asia along the border of China's autonomous region of Tibet, are the highest mountains in the world and the dominant physical feature of the northern rim of South Asia. Other countries that share the Himalayas include Nepal, Bhutan, India, and Pakistan. Farther north along the Himalayan range, the traditional region of **Kashmir** is divided between India, Pakistan, and China. On the opposite side of the Himalayas are two island countries off the coast of southern India. The first is Sri Lanka, a large tropical island off India's southeast coast, and the other is the Republic of Maldives, an **archipelago** (group of islands) off the southwest coast of India. Maldives comprises almost 1,200 islands that barely rise above sea level; the highest elevation is merely seven feet, seven inches. Only about two hundred islands in the Maldives are inhabited.

The balancing of natural capital and population growth is and will remain a primary issue in the realm's future. South Asia is highly populated, with about one-and-a-half billion people representing a wide range of ethnic and cultural groups. The diverse population has been brought together into political units that have roots in the realm's colonial past, primarily under Great Britain. British colonialism had a significant impact on the realm; its long-term effects include political divisions and conflicts in places such as Kashmir and Sri Lanka.

Current globalizing forces are compelling South Asian countries to establish a trade network and institute economic policies among themselves. South Asia is not one of the three main economic core areas of the world; however, it is emerging to compete in the world marketplace. Some would call India a part of the semiperiphery, which means it is not actually in the core or in the periphery but displays qualities of both. All the same, India remains the dominant country of South Asia and shares either a physical boundary or a marine boundary with all the other countries in the realm.

All countries north of Afghanistan were once part of the former Soviet Union. During the Cold War, the South Asian countries were in the shadow of the superpowers and had to engage in diplomacy to balance their relationships between the Soviet Union and the United States. Communist China is an emerging economic power and has used Tibet as a buffer state with its rival, India. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been working to reestablish itself in the global economy. Like India, Russia portrays qualities of the semiperiphery. The United States has had a major impact on the affairs of the South Asian realm, even though it is physically located on the other side of the world. The United States has been at war in neighboring Afghanistan since 2001 and has also been a major economic trading partner with the countries of South Asia. Complicating the situation, the United States has developed an extensive trade relationship with neighboring China. Economic advancements and global trade have catapulted the countries of South Asia onto the world stage.

9.1 Introducing the Realm

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Summarize the realm's physical geography. Identify each country's main features and physical attributes and locate the realm's main river systems.
2. Understand the dynamics of the monsoon and how it affects human activities.
3. Outline the early civilizations of South Asia and learn how they gave rise to the early human development patterns that have shaped the realm.
4. Describe how European colonialism impacted the realm.
5. Learn about the basic demographic trends the realm is experiencing. Understand how rapid population growth is a primary concern for the countries of South Asia.

The Physical Geography

The landmass of South Asia was formed by the Indian Plate colliding with the Eurasian Plate. This action started about seventy million years ago and gave rise to the highest mountain ranges in the world. Most of the South Asian landmass is formed from the land in the original Indian Plate. Pressure from tectonic action against the plates causes the Himalayas to rise in elevation by as much as one to five millimeters per year. Destructive earthquakes and tremors are frequent in this seismically active realm. The great size of the Himalayas has intensely influenced the beliefs and traditions of the people in the realm. Some of the mountains are considered sacred to certain religions that exist here.

Figure 9.2 *Trekking Trail on the Way to Mt. Everest in the Himalayas of Northern Nepal*



Mt. Everest is the world's highest peak at 29,035 feet. The Himalayas are the highest mountain chain in the world and create a natural border between South Asia and China.

Source: Photo courtesy of Steve Hicks, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/shicks/2515990913>.

The Himalayan Mountains dominate the physical landscape in the northern region of South Asia. **Mt. Everest** is the tallest peak in the world, at 29,035 feet. Three key rivers cross South Asia, all originating from the Himalayas. The **Indus River**, which has been a center of human civilization for thousands of years, starts in Tibet and flows through the center of Pakistan. The **Ganges River** flows through northern India, creating a core region of the country. The **Brahmaputra River** flows through Tibet and then enters India from the east, where it meets up with the Ganges in Bangladesh to flow into the Bay of Bengal. While the northern part of this region includes some of the highest elevations in the world, the Maldives in the south has some of the lowest elevations, some barely above sea level. The coastal regions in southern Bangladesh also have low elevations. When the seasonal reversal of winds called the **monsoon**¹ arrives every year, there is heavy flooding and its effect on the infrastructure of the region is disastrous. The extensive **Thar Desert** in western India and parts of Pakistan, on the other hand, does not receive monsoon rains. In

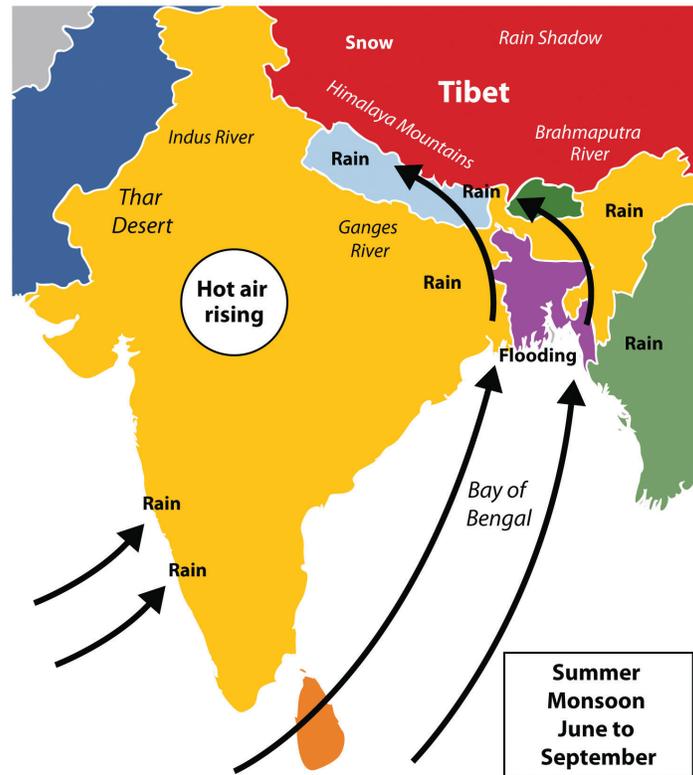
1. Seasonal reversal of wind that is common in parts of Asia. The summer monsoon is usually associated with high amounts of rainfall.

fact, much of southwest Pakistan—a region called **Baluchistan**—is dry, with desert conditions.

The mountains on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan extend through Kashmir and then meet up with the high ranges of the Himalayas. The Himalayas create a natural barrier between India and China, with the kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan acting as buffer states with Tibet. Farther south along the east and west coasts of India are shorter mountain ranges called ghats. The **Western Ghats** reach as high as eight thousand feet, but average around three thousand feet. These ghats are home to an extensive range of biodiversity. The **Eastern Ghats** are not as high as the Western Ghats, but have similar physical qualities. The ghats provide a habitat for a wide range of animals and are also home to large coffee and tea estates. The **Deccan Plateau** lies between the Eastern and Western Ghats. The **Central Indian Plateau** and the **Chota-Nagpur Plateau** are located in the central parts of India, north of the two Ghat ranges. The monsoon rains ensure that an average of about fifty-two inches of rain per year falls on the Chota-Nagpur Plateau, which has a tiger reserve and is also a refuge for Asian elephants.

The Monsoon

A monsoon is a seasonal reversal of winds that is associated with heavy rains. The summer monsoon rains—usually falling between June and September—feed the rivers and streams of South Asia and provide the water needed for agricultural production. In the summer, the continent heats up, with the Thar Desert fueling the system. The rising hot air creates a vacuum that pulls in warm moist air from the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. This action shifts moisture-laden clouds over the land, where the water is precipitated out in the form of rain.

Figure 9.3 *The Monsoon System in South Asia*

Source: Updated from map courtesy of *historicaire*, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asie.svg>.

The monsoon rains bring moisture to South Asia right up to the Himalayas. As moisture-laden clouds rise in elevation in the mountains, the water vapor condenses in the form of rain or snow and feeds the streams and basins that flow into the major rivers, such as the Brahmaputra, Ganges, and Indus. The Western Ghats creates a similar system in the south along the west coast of India. Parts of Bangladesh and eastern India receive as much as six feet of rain during the monsoon season, and some areas experience severe flooding. The worst-hit places are along the coast of the Bay of Bengal, such as in Bangladesh. There is less danger of flooding in western India and Pakistan, because by the time the rain clouds have moved across India they have lost their moisture. Desert conditions are evident in the west, near the Pakistan border in the great Thar Desert. On average, fewer than ten inches of rain fall per year in this massive desert. On the northern rim of the region, the height of the Himalayas restricts the warm moist monsoon air from moving across the mountain range. The Himalayas act as a precipitation barrier and create a strong rain shadow effect for Tibet and Western China. The monsoon is responsible for much of the rainfall in South Asia.

By October, the system has run its course and the monsoon season is generally over. In the winter, the cold, dry air above the Asian continent blows to the south, and the winter monsoon is characterized by cool, dry winds coming from the north. South Asia experiences a dry season during the winter months. A similar pattern of rainy summer season and dry winter season is found in other parts of the world, such as southern China and some of Southeast Asia. A final note about the monsoons: small parts of South Asia, such as Sri Lanka and southeastern India, experience a rainy winter monsoon as well as a rainy summer monsoon. In their case, the winter monsoon winds that come down from the north have a chance to pick up moisture from the Bay of Bengal before depositing it on their shores.

Early Civilizations

The Indian subcontinent has a long history of human occupation, and is an area where cities independently developed and civilization emerged. The earliest civilization on the subcontinent was the **Indus Valley Civilization**, in existence from about 3300 BCE to 1500 BCE. This Bronze Age civilization started as a series of small villages that became linked in a wider regional network. Urban centers developed into various religious and trade networks that spanned as far as Central Asia, Southwest Asia, and, perhaps, Egypt. The civilization is known for its planned structures. The cities and villages of the urban phases were planned with major streets going north/south and east/west. It had a system of drains that channeled waste water outside the city. Additionally, this civilization had a homogeneous material culture. Its artifacts of pottery and metallurgy all had a very similar style that was spread over a vast land area, a fact that aided in the recognition of the expanse of the culture.

Invasions by outsiders have the potential effect of bringing with them an influx of new ideas, concepts, and technology. Likewise, the Indus Valley Civilization no doubt had an impact on the region that it encompassed. Little is known of the historical events of earlier times. Some of the evidence we rely on today to discern historical events is gleaned from language, religion, and ethnicity. Significant to South Asia is the presence of Indo-European languages. It is presumed that these languages were brought to the region by immigrants from the west, where these languages were dominant. Aryans from Persia and other cultures might have diffused languages such as Hindi to South Asia, which later may have led to Hindi, for example, becoming the lingua franca of the region.

The northern plains of South Asia, which extend through the Ganges River valley over to the Indus River valley of present-day Pakistan, were fertile grounds for a number of empires that controlled the region throughout history. After the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization, various phases of Iron Age traditions emerged. Most

of this Iron Age culture is defined by the presence of iron metallurgy and distinctive characteristics of ceramics.

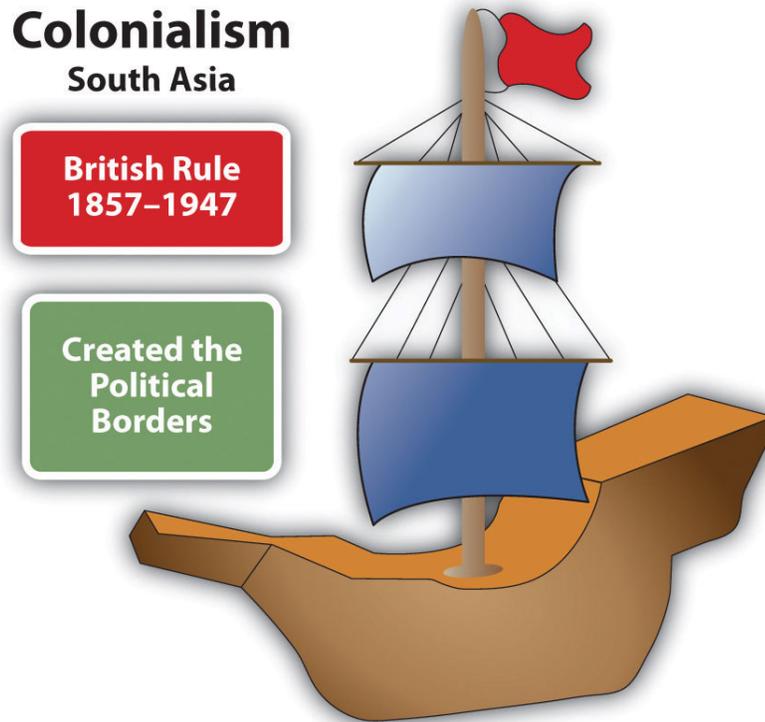
The **Mauryan Empire** existed between 322 and 185 BCE and was one of the most extensive and powerful political and military empires in ancient India. This empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya in 322 BCE, who began to extend his regime westward, easily conquering areas that had been disrupted by the expansion of Alexander the Great's armies. The Mauryan Empire was prosperous and greatly expanded the region's trade, agriculture, and economic activities. This empire created a single and efficient system of finance, administration, and security. One of the greatest emperors in the Mauryan dynasty was Ashoka the Great, who ruled over a long period of peace and prosperity. Ashoka embraced Buddhism and focused on peace for much of his rule. He created hospitals and schools and renovated major road systems throughout the empire. His advancement of Buddhist ideals is credited with being the reason most of the population on the island of Sri Lanka is Buddhist to this day.

Islam became a powerful force in South Asia upon its diffusion to the subcontinent. Muslim dynasties or kingdoms that ruled India between 1206 and 1526 are referred to collectively as the **Delhi Sultanate**. The Delhi Sultanate ended in 1526 when it was absorbed into the expanding **Mughal Empire**. The Islamic Mughal Empire ruled over much of northern and central India from the 1500s to about the middle of the nineteenth century. After 1725, it began to decline rapidly because of a combination of factors, with European colonialism adding the finishing touch. The Mughal Empire had been religiously tolerant but Muslim oriented. The classic period of this empire began in 1556 and ended in 1707. Many of the monuments we associate with India, including the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort in Lahore, and the Agra Fort, were built during the classical period.

Colonialism in South Asia

The force of colonialism was felt around the world, including in South Asia. South Asia provides an excellent example of colonialism's role in establishing most of the current political borders in the world. From the sixteenth century onward, ships from colonial Europe began to arrive in South Asia to conduct trade. The British East India Company was chartered in 1600 to trade in Asia and India. They traded in spices, silk, cotton, and other goods. Later, to take advantage of conflicts and bitter rivalries between kingdoms, European powers began to establish colonies. Britain controlled South Asia from 1857 to 1947.

Figure 9.4



British colonialism in South Asia began in 1857 and lasted until 1947.

Goa is the smallest state in modern-day India. In the sixteenth century, it was first encountered by Portuguese traders, who annexed it shortly after arriving. Goa was a colony of Portugal for the next 450 years. By the mid-1800s, most of the population of the tiny area had been forcibly converted to Christianity. Many of the Hindu traditions, however, survived in the region. Hindu holidays are celebrated among the expatriate community in India. Christian holidays are also celebrated, especially Christmas and Easter. The cathedrals and secular architecture in many of the historic buildings of Goa are European in style, reflecting its Portuguese origins. This architecture is locally termed “Indo-Portuguese.” Goa was one of the longest-held colonial possessions in the world. It was finally annexed to India in 1961.

The British no longer controlled South Asia after 1947. Local resistance and the devastating effects of World War II meant the British Empire could not be controlled as it once was. Great Britain pulled away from empire building to focus on its own redevelopment. Upon the British withdrawal from India, Britain realized the immense cultural differences between the Muslims and Hindus and created

political boundaries based on those differences. **West Pakistan** was carved out of western India; **East Pakistan** was carved from eastern India. However, the new borders separating Hindu and Muslim majorities ran through population groups, and some of the population now found itself to be on the wrong side of the border. The West Pakistan-India partition grew into a tragic civil war, as Hindus and Muslims struggled to migrate to their country of choice. More than one million people died in the civil war, a war that is still referred to in today's political dialogue between Pakistan and India. The **Sikhs**, who are indigenous to the **Punjab** region in the middle, also suffered greatly. Some people decided not to migrate, which explains why India has the largest Muslim population of any non-Muslim state.

Another civil war would erupt in 1973 between West Pakistan and East Pakistan. When the states were first created in 1947, they operated under the same government despite having no common border and being over nine hundred miles apart and populated by people with no ethnic similarities. The civil war lasted about three months and resulted in the creation of the sovereign countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). The name Bangladesh is based on the Bengali ethnicity of most of the people who live there. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh are among the top ten most populous countries in the world.

Language is probably one of the more pervasive ways that Europeans affected South Asia. In modern-day India and Pakistan, English is the language of choice in secondary education (English-medium schools). It is often the language used by the government and military. Unlike many other Asian countries, much of the signage and advertising in Pakistan and India is in English, even in rural areas. Educated people switch back and forth, using English words or entire English sentences during conversation in their native tongue. Some scholars have termed this Hinglish or Urglish as the base languages of northern India and Pakistan are Hindi and Urdu, respectively.

The British game of cricket is an important cultural and national sport within this Asian subcontinent. The constant conflict between the nations of India and Pakistan are reflected in the intense rivalry between their national cricket teams. The Cricket World Cup is held every four years and is awarded by the International Cricket Council. South Asian countries have won the Cricket World Cup three times: India (1983), Pakistan (1992), and Sri Lanka (1996).

Population in South Asia

South Asia has three of the ten most populous countries in the world. India is the second largest in the world, and Pakistan and Bangladesh are numbers five and six,

respectively. Large populations are a product of large family sizes and a high fertility rate. The rural population of South Asia has traditionally had large families. Religious traditions do not necessarily support anything other than a high fertility rate. On the other hand, the least densely populated country in South Asia is the Kingdom of Bhutan. Bhutan has a population density of only fifty people per square mile. Bhutan is mountainous with little arable land. More than a third of the people in Bhutan live in an urban setting. Population overgrowth for the realm is a serious concern. An increase in population requires additional natural resources, energy, and food production, all of which are in short supply in many areas.

Table 9.1 Demographics of South Asia and the World's Most Populous Countries

Rank	Country name	Population in millions	Total population density	Physiologic density	Fertility rate	Population growth rate (%)	Doubling time in years [†]	P
1	China	1,336	361	2,405	1.54	0.49	143	
2	India*	1,189	937	1,912	2.62	1.34	52	
3	United States	313	84	468	2.06	0.96	73	
4	Indonesia	245	331	3,013	2.25	1.07	65	
5	Brazil	203	62	884	2.18	1.13	62	
6	Pakistan*	187	604	2,414	3.17	1.57	45	
7	Bangladesh*	158	2,852	5,186	2.60	1.57	45	
8	Nigeria	155	435	1,319	4.73	1.94	36	
9	Russia	138	21	301	1.42	-0.47		
10	Japan	126	867	7,225	1.21	-0.28		
11	Mexico	113	149	1,149	2.29	1.10	64	
41	Nepal*	29	525	3,379	2.47	1.59	44	
57	Sri Lanka*	21	862	6,001	2.2	0.93	75	
165	Bhutan*	0.700	50	1,697	2.2	1.2	58	
176	Maldives*	0.400	3,438	26,194	1.81	-0.15		
* Countries noted with an asterisk are part of South Asia								
[†] Empty cell indicates a negative population doubling time.								

Source: CIA World Factbook, June 2011, accessed September 13, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>.

South Asia's growing population has placed exceedingly high demands on agricultural production. The amount of area available for food production divided by the population may be a more helpful indicator of population distribution than total population density. For example, large portions of Pakistan are deserts and mountains that do not provide arable land for food production. India has the Thar Desert and the northern mountains. Nepal has the Himalayas. The small country of the Maldives, with its many islands, has almost no arable land. The number of people per square mile of arable land, which is called the **physiologic density**², can be an important indicator of a country's status. Total population densities are high in South Asia, but the physiologic densities are even more astounding. In Bangladesh, for example, more than five thousand people depend on every square mile of arable land. In Sri Lanka the physiologic density reaches to more than 6,000 people per square mile, and in Pakistan it is more than 2,400. The data are averages, which indicate that the population density in the fertile river valleys and the agricultural lowlands might be even higher.

Figure 9.5 *Crowded Street in New Delhi, India*



Urban areas of South Asia are expanding rapidly.

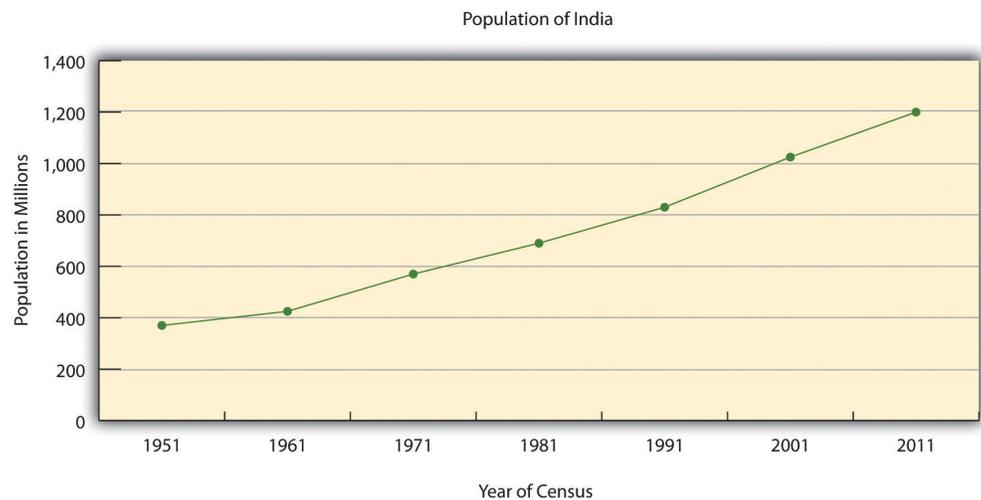
2. The number of people per unit (square mile) of arable land.

Source: Photo courtesy of John Haslam, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/foxypar4/415375182>.

The population of South Asia is relatively young. In Pakistan about 35 percent of the population is under the age of fifteen, while about 30 percent of India's almost 1.2 billion people are under the age of fifteen. Many of these young people live in rural areas, as most of the people of South Asia work in agriculture and live a subsistence lifestyle. As the population increases, the cities are swelling to accompany the growth in the urban population and the large influx of migrants arriving from rural areas. Rural-to-urban shift is extremely high in South Asia and will continue to fuel the expansion of the urban centers into some of the largest cities on the planet. The rural-to-urban shift that is occurring in South Asia also coincides with an increase in the region's interaction with the global economy.

The South Asian countries are transitioning through the five stages of the index of economic development. The more rural agricultural regions are in the lower stages of the index. The realm experienced rapid population growth during the latter half of the twentieth century. As death rates declined and family size remained high, the population swiftly increased. India, for example, grew from fewer than four hundred million in 1950 to more than one billion at the turn of the century. The more urbanized areas are transitioning into stage 3 of the index and experiencing significant rural-to-urban shift. Large cities such as Mumbai (Bombay) have sectors that are in the latter stages of the index because of their urbanized work force and higher incomes. Family size is decreasing in the more urbanized areas and in the realm as a whole, and demographers predict that eventually the population will stabilize.

Figure 9.6 Population Growth in India



Source: Data courtesy of CIA World Factbook.

At the current rates of population growth, the population of South Asia will double in about fifty years. Doubling the population of Bangladesh would be the equivalent of having the entire 2011 population of the United States (more than 313 million people) all living within the borders of the US state of Wisconsin. The general rule of calculating **doubling time**³ for a population is to take the number seventy and divide it by the population growth rate. For Bangladesh the doubling time would be $70 \div 1.57 = 45$ years. The doubling time for a population can help determine the economic prospects of a country or region. South Asia is coming under an increased burden of population growth. If India continues at its current rate of population increase, it will double its population in fifty-two years, to approximately 2.4 billion. Because the region's rate of growth has been gradually in decline, this doubling time is unlikely. However, without continued attention to how the societies address family planning and birth control, South Asia will likely face serious resource shortages in the future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- All the South Asian countries border India by either a physical or a marine boundary. The Himalayas form a natural boundary between South Asia and East Asia (China). The realm is surrounded by deserts, the Indian Ocean, and the high Himalayan ranges.
- The summer monsoon arrives in South Asia in late May or early June and subsides by early October. The rains that accompany the monsoon account for most of the rainfall for South Asia. Water is a primary resource, and the larger river systems are home to large populations.
- The Indus River Valley was a location of early human civilization. The large empires of the realm gave way to European colonialism. The British dominated the realm for ninety years from 1857 to 1947 and established the main boundaries of the realm.
- Population growth is a major concern for South Asia. The already enormous populations of South Asia continue to increase, challenging the economic systems and depleting natural resources at an unsustainable rate.

3. The time it takes a population to double. The accepted formula is $70 \div \text{population growth rate} = \text{doubling time in years}$.

DISCUSSION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why are the Himalayan Mountains continuing to increase in elevation? Which of the countries of South Asia border the Himalayas?
2. What are the three major rivers of South Asia? Where do they start and what bodies of water do they flow into? Why have these river basins been such an important part of the early civilizations of the realm and why are they core population areas today?
3. Why does the monsoon usually arrive in late May or early June? What is the main precipitation pattern that accompanies the monsoon? Why is the monsoon a major source of support for South Asia's large population?
4. What changes did British colonialism bring to South Asia? When did the British control South Asia? Why do you think the British lost control when they did?
5. Why is the high population growth rate a serious concern for South Asian countries? What can these countries do to address the high population growth rate?
6. How can Pakistan have a higher fertility rate than Bangladesh but still have the same growth rate and doubling time?
7. Why would the country of the Maldives be concerned about climate change?
8. How would you assess the status of each country with regard to the index of economic development?
9. What are the three dominant religions of the realm? How did religion play a role in establishing the realms' borders? What happened to East Pakistan?
10. How can the principle of doubling time be used to assess a country's future potential? What is the general formula to calculate a population's doubling time?

GEOGRAPHY EXERCISE

Identify the following key places on a map:

- Arabian Sea
- Baluchistan
- Bay of Bengal
- Brahmaputra River
- Central Indian Plateau
- Chota-Nagpur Plateau
- Deccan Plateau
- Eastern Ghats
- Ganges River
- Himalayas
- Indian Ocean
- Indus River
- Kashmir
- Mt. Everest
- Punjab
- Thar Desert
- Western Ghats

9.2 The Peripheral States of South Asia

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Outline the main physical features of the countries described in this section.
2. Understand how cultural differences in religion and ethnicity continue to cause conflict and division in South Asian countries and regions.
3. Outline how and why Kashmir is divided and its importance for the region.
4. Describe how tourism has been a means of gaining wealth for the listed countries.
5. Summarize the main environmental concerns that are apparent in each of the countries.

As detailed earlier, the Indian subcontinent is a large landmass that juts into the Indian Ocean along the southern side of Asia, between Afghanistan and Myanmar (Burma) and south of China. The Indian perimeter includes the southern countries of the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and the northern regions of the Punjab, Kashmir, Nepal, and Bhutan. This landmass has a long tectonic history and has been formed by the collision of the Indian Tectonic Plate with the Eurasian Plate. This tectonic collision has given rise to the highest mountain chains and ranges in the world along the northern and northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent—that is, the Himalayas.

The **Karakoram Mountains** are located in northern Pakistan and Kashmir. Together with the other Himalayan Mountain ranges, they form an arc that stretches across the entire northern border of South Asia. Nepal and Bhutan are both located in the Himalayas. The Himalayan ranges have some of the highest peaks in the region, including Mount Everest (located on the border between Nepal and China) and K2 (located in Pakistan). In western Pakistan and western Afghanistan, the **Hindu Kush** mountain ranges that border this area are found. The Indus River flows from the northern part of the Karakoram mountains and creates a large, fertile flood plain. Along its northern area, the Indus River System has four main tributaries. Together, these rivers constitute the five rivers of the **Punjab** regions of Pakistan and India; Punjab means the “land of the five rivers” in the Punjabi language.

The Punjab

The Punjab is a fertile agricultural region with a high population density located on the border between India and Pakistan. Areas of the Punjab lie in both India and Pakistan. Where there is ample fresh water and bountiful food production, there is usually high population density. The Punjab is the most densely populated region in Pakistan. India has a separate state called the Punjab. Its river valleys are excellent areas for agricultural production and contribute heavily to the provisions needed to feed the enormous populations of the two countries.

The Punjabi people are found in the Punjab State of India and the Punjab Province of Pakistan. This large cultural area was separated into two countries during Partition at the time of Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Most of the people in the Punjab speak Punjabi, an Indo-European language. In a larger context, people with Punjabi background are considered one of the main ethnic groups in South Asia. Punjabis account for about 45 percent of the population of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, the Punjabis are grouped in clans and groups that correspond with traditional occupations. Traditionally, Punjabis are farmers and warriors, and in modern times are associated with agricultural professions and military life. Punjabis in Pakistan are predominantly Muslim, although a Christian minority exists. Indian Punjabis belong to traditional groups, including many of the same groups as in Pakistan, but many more. Most of the Muslim populations of the Punjab migrated to Pakistan in 1947 and, thus, most of the Indian Punjabis are Sikh with a Christian minority.

Figure 9.7



Sikhs protest against India's opposition to their proposed homeland (nation-state) in the Punjab called Khalistan.

People gravitate toward nation-state systems, but globalization supports integration across political boundaries.

Source: Photo courtesy of Aaron Jones, 2004.

The Punjab region of Pakistan and India is the homeland of the Sikhs, people who follow a religion that is different from Islam or Hinduism. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469–1538). All distinctions of caste, creed, race, or gender are rejected in this religion. In Sikhism there is no priestly class. Every person is equally and fully responsible for leading a moral life, which eventually leads to universal salvation. Heaven and hell are not physical places, and God is the cosmic universal spirit. Historically, traditional Sikh men wear turbans on their heads and never cut their hair or beard. Sikhism is a universal religion. A prominent Sikh landmark and spiritual center is their Golden Temple, located in the city of Amritsar in the Indian state of the Punjab.

Sikhism is a system of religious philosophy and expression, known as the Gurmat or the counsel of the gurus, or the Sikh Dharma (or way of life). Sikhism comes from the Hindi and Punjabi word *sikhna*, which means “to learn.” The principal belief in Sikhism is faith in the universal God. Sikhism promotes the pursuit of salvation through discipline and personal meditation on the name and message of God. However, it must be mentioned that Sikhs have a nonanthropomorphic concept of God; that is, Sikhs do not envision God as having any form or shape or mind similar to that of humans. Sikhism has become the fifth-most widely adhered to religion on Earth.

During British colonial occupation of South Asia, Sikhs were elevated to positions of power to help the British rule over Muslim and Hindu populations. The Sikhs are often overshadowed by the large Hindu and Muslim populations in the realm. Many of the Sikhs would like to have their own nation-state, free from Muslim or Hindu domination, and would like to see the Punjab region become the new homeland for this nation-state, called **Khalistan**⁴. They have held rallies and demonstrations to promote the creation of Khalistan. The Indian government has, however, cracked down on militant movements that support the Khalistan concept. The Khalistan movement was more popular in the 1970s and 1980s and has been scaled down in recent decades. Proponents still attempt to attract young people and foreign donations to its cause. Khalistan does not have the support of the Pakistani and Indian governments and is not likely to become a reality any time soon. Khalistan is an example of the devolutionary push for a nation-state political unit for a particular group of people with similar aspirations or heritage.

4. Proposed homeland for the Sikhs in the Punjab region of South Asia.

The Kingdom of Kashmir

Located in the high mountains of the north is the former Kingdom of Kashmir, a separate kingdom before the British divided South Asia. In 1947, when the British drew the boundary between India and Pakistan, the leader of Kashmir, the maharajah, chose not to be a part of either country but to remain independent. About 75 percent of the population in Kashmir was Muslim; the rest, including the maharajah, were mainly Hindu. This arrangement worked for a time, until the Muslim majority was encouraged by their fellow Muslims in Pakistan to join Pakistan. After a Muslim uprising, the maharajah asked the Indian military for assistance. India was more than pleased to oblige and saw it as an opportunity to oppose Pakistan one more time. Today Kashmir is divided, with Pakistan controlling the northern region, India controlling the southern region, and China controlling a portion of the eastern region. A cease-fire has been implemented, but outbreaks of fighting have occurred. The future of Kashmir is unclear. None of the countries involved wants to start a large-scale war, because they all have nuclear weapons.

Figure 9.8 *The Issues with Kashmir*



Pakistan controls the northern areas, India controls Jammu and Kashmir, and China controls the eastern portion, labeled Aksai Chin on this map. All three countries have nuclear weapons, and it seems apparent that none of the countries wants to start a nuclear war.

Source: Updated from map courtesy of University of Texas Libraries, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/kashmir_disputed_2002.jpg.

The conflict in Kashmir is about strategic location and control of water rather than labor and resources. It is unknown whether there are abundant minerals in the mountains in Kashmir to be mined, but regardless, there is little mining activity going on, not enough to cause conflict. One of the main physical geography features of importance is water. The Indus River flows through Kashmir from Tibet and into Pakistan. The control of this river system is critical to the survival of people living in northern Pakistan. If India were to place a dam on the river and divert the water to their side of the border, to the dry regions of the south, Pakistan could suffer a water shortage in the northern part of the country. Another aspect of the Kashmir conflict goes back to the division of Pakistan and India, which pitted Muslims against Hindus along the border region. The religious differences have come to the surface again in the conflict over the control of Kashmir. Extremist movements within Kashmir by the Muslim population have fueled the division between those who support Pakistan and those who support Hindu-dominated India.

The Kingdom of Bhutan

Landlocked and mountainous, the small Kingdom of Bhutan is remotely located next to the high Himalayas between China and India. The mountain peaks reach more than twenty-three thousand feet. Bhutan is about half the size in physical area of the US state of Kentucky and has fewer than one million people. The southern plains are warm, with subtropical weather, but the higher altitudes of the snow-capped mountains have polar-type climates. The local people call their country the “Land of the Thunder Dragon” because of the harsh storms they experience. Bhutan has large areas of natural habitat that have not been disturbed by human activity. The natural environment and the unique heritage and culture of the people make Bhutan an attractive destination for world travelers.

Bhutan is a small country without much industry or high-tech corporate involvement. Forestry and agriculture are the main economic activities, which account for approximately 60 percent of the country’s population. Grazing livestock and subsistence agriculture are the primary types of farming. Increasing the country’s modest infrastructure is hampered by its high mountains and remote location. India is Bhutan’s main trading partner and has played an important role in the country’s development and economic situation.

Figure 9.9 Bhutan's Famous Taktshang Buddhist Monastery, Commonly Known as the Tiger's Nest



The unique landscapes and cultural experience that Bhutan offers to travelers have promoted tourism as an increasing economic activity.

Source: Photo courtesy of Avinash Singh, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/8077290@N03/4034690728>.

Modern transportation and communication technologies are being introduced in Bhutan and are changing how the country is connected to the rest of the global economy. Satellite and cable television, mobile phone networks, the Internet, and major airline service are opening the doors of opportunity and interaction between the people of Bhutan and the rest of the world. Introduction of technological services has prompted Bhutan's government to take steps to protect its environment and unique heritage. Tourism has become a major focus of the changes. The country has stepped up its efforts to develop tourism but has targeted a specific type of traveler. Bhutan is an expensive place to visit, which has been the biggest deterrent for travelers. Visitors from places other than India and Bangladesh must agree to strict requirements set by the suppliers of Bhutanese tourism, including large daily fees just to be in the country. Tourism is increasing in Bhutan but remains highly selective in its requirements and regulations. These measures are to ensure that the environmental health of the country remains intact and that there is minimal cultural impact from outsiders.

Buddhism is the state religion and is followed by about 75 percent of the population. Hinduism is the second-largest religion and is followed by the other 25 percent of the population. One of the principles of the government in regulating development projects has been the concept of **gross national happiness**⁵ (GNH), which is used as a guide to determine the impact of a project on the culture and people of Bhutan. The stern measures regarding development have protected the country from serious environmental degradation and have helped to sustain the lifestyles of the Bhutanese people. Some measures may appear harsh to outsiders, but the country is implementing these measures to promote the health and well-being of its people. For example, tobacco products are banned from being sold in the country. Democratic elections are becoming standard after centuries of rule by a monarchy. The intent of the transition is to provide the people with more direct control of their government and country.

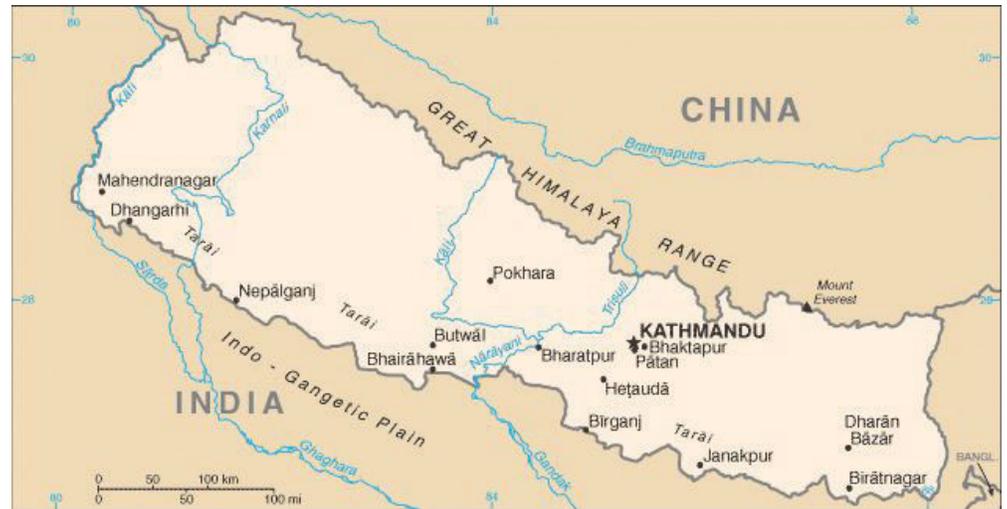
Interesting points about the culture of Bhutan include the issue of marriage. Marriages based on love are becoming more common in the cities, while arranged marriages remain a tradition in many of the smaller villages. Under the current legal system, women have the right to inheritance. Homes and personal possessions are passed down through a family's female children. Traditionally, male children do not inherit. Men are expected to earn their own livelihood and if they get married will most often live in the wife's house.

Archery is the national sport of Bhutan. Most villages regularly hold archery competitions, which usually include festivities of serving food and conducting community events.

5. Measure of cultural well-being used to guide development in Bhutan.

The Kingdom of Nepal

Figure 9.10 *The Himalayan Mountains and the Tarai Lowlands of Nepal*



Source: Map courtesy of CIA World Factbook.

Bordering the highest mountain range in the world, the Himalayas, the country of Nepal is isolated from any seacoast and buffered from the outside world by India and China. Nepal is about the same size in physical area as Bangladesh, and is home to almost thirty million people. More than 80 percent of its people work the land in a region that is suffering from severe deforestation and soil erosion. Trees are cut down to build houses, to cook food, and to keep warm. Without trees to hold the soil, the monsoon rains wash soil from the mountain fields into the valleys. The combination of the fast-growing population with the loss of food-growing capacity means it is only a matter of time before a major crisis occurs in Nepal. Nepal's best farmland is in the **Tarai lowlands** of southern Nepal, while the north is quite mountainous. The towering elevation of the Himalayas restricts human habitation in the north. High population growth has also been outstripping the country's economic growth rate in recent years.

Nepal has an abundance of tourist attractions, **Mt. Everest** being its best known. In addition, there are hundreds of ancient temples and monasteries. Swift flowing streams and high-mountain terrain support a modest trekking industry. Visitors to Nepal have an opportunity to glimpse a rich culture that few outsiders can witness. The downside is that tourism demands an investment in infrastructure and services. Such investments direct funds away from schools, medical clinics, and public services needed by the Nepalese people. Income from tourism is needed and always welcome, but the trade-off with investments is a difficult choice to make.

Tourism in Nepal is not as restrictive as that of Bhutan, and the unique physical and cultural landscapes will continue to draw travelers from throughout the world.

Figure 9.11 *The Deforested Landscape of Nepal*



Deforestation is a serious problem. The trees are cut down for firewood and building materials. The winding road connects Kathmandu with Tibet.

Source: Photo courtesy of US Department of Agriculture, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nepal_landscape_1.jpg.

Hinduism is the main religion in Nepal, but a blend of Buddhism is more prevalent in the north. The guardian deity of Nepal is Shiva. **Pashupatinath Temple**, the world's most significant Shiva worship site, is located in the capital city of Kathmandu. This Shiva temple is not only a UNESCO World Heritage Site but a major destination for Hindu pilgrims from around the world. Buddhist and Hindu beliefs often mix in Nepal. There are certain situations where the same deities and temples can be honored or worshipped by members of both religions.

In a different part of Nepal, Lumbini—near the city of Bhairahawa (Siddharthanagar), on the border with India—is another UNESCO World Heritage Site, this one focusing on the birthplace of the Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. Prince Siddhartha Gautama was born about 563 BCE, near Lumbini. The city has recognized the prince with a number of monasteries and temples built in

his honor. An entire development zone is restricted to nothing but monasteries and temples. No other commercial or public buildings—such as hotels, shops, or businesses—can be constructed in the zone. The different branches of the Buddhist faith each have their own specific designated sections of the zone. Lumbini is a major pilgrimage site for Buddhist believers from around the world.

In the late 1700s, local states of Nepal were consolidated into the one kingdom and ruled by monarchy. The kingdom was ruled by royal families until the mid-1900s. Nepal has been free of British influence since 1947, but has had trouble establishing a stable central government. The royal family in charge of the kingdom was replaced in 1951, and further democratic reforms were made in 1990. Communist partisans from China have been active in insurgent activities. Frequent protests and civil unrest have caused political instability, which has discouraged tourism and has depressed the economy even further. The Maoist Communist movement and other opposition political parties held mass protests, culminating in a peace accord. Ensuing elections created the establishment of a federal democratic republic. The first president of Nepal was sworn into office in 2008. There is still much tension in the country between those loyal to the royal family and those wanting the royal family to be dissolved. Without a stable government, economic and political progress in Nepal will be a serious challenge.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a beautiful island about half the size of Nepal. The island has a warm, tropical type A climate, with forested hills and mountains in the center. Rivers flow from the center outward to water the farm fields of rice and other crops. The best farmland is located in the Sinhalese-controlled areas of the southwestern portions of the island. Cinnamon is native to the island and has been cultivated since colonial times as an important export. Coconuts, coffee, and tea are also important export products. The island is home to various national parks, four biosphere reserves, and several wild elephant herds. Sri Lanka has the potential to become a major tourist destination with high incomes and a hub for international trade. Factors working against Sri Lanka reaching its potential are not based on its physical geography or location, but rather they are linked back to colonialism and cultural or ethnic divisions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority.

The people of South Asia follow various religions. Pakistan and Bangladesh are Muslim. India has a Hindu majority. About 90 percent of the people of Nepal are considered Hindu but many follow a unique blend of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. The small, mystical, mountainous kingdom of Bhutan is Buddhist. Sri Lanka has its own unique circumstances and is a mixed country with a strong Buddhist majority and an active Hindu minority. The conflict between the majority and the minority ethnic groups fueled a low-level civil war on the island for decades. Differences in

religion, ethnicity, and politics have brought the country to halt on various occasions.

Figure 9.12 *Picking Tea in Sri Lanka*

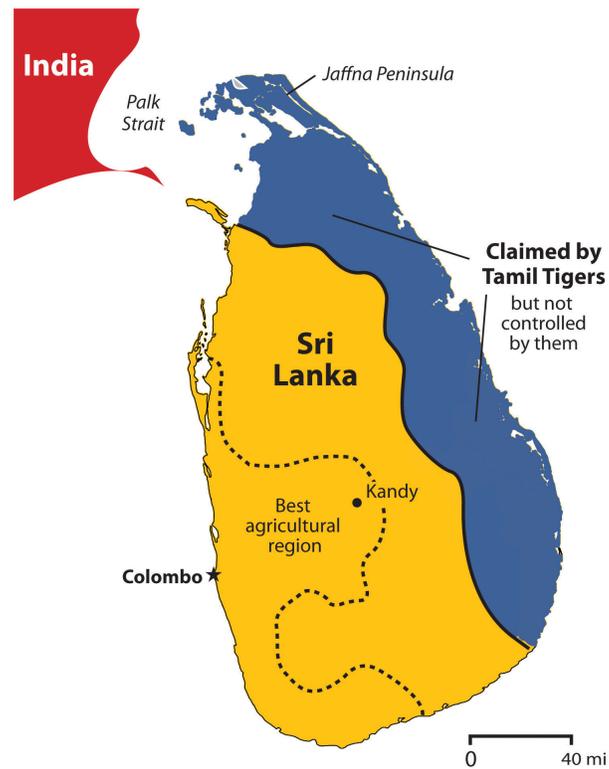


Tea, coffee, and cinnamon are export products of Sri Lanka.

Source: Photo courtesy of Tallis, Keeton, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/talliskeeton/4213332192>.

Sinhalese people from somewhere in northern India moved to the island of Sri Lanka about 2,500 years ago. The Sinhalese brought with them Buddhism and the Sinhala language, which belongs to the Indo-European language family. They established themselves on the island for centuries. Sri Lanka was first colonized by Portugal, then Holland. When the British colonized South Asia, they took control of Sri Lanka. It was called **Ceylon** at that time and changed its name to Sri Lanka in 1972. The higher elevations of the center of the island were excellent for tea production; British colonizers established tea plantations there. To work the plantations Britain brought thousands of additional Tamil laborers from southern India across the **Polk Strait** to Ceylon. Most of the Tamil speak a **Dravidian** language and follow the Hindu religion.

Figure 9.13 Claims of Tamil in Sri Lanka



The Tamil Tigers laid claim to a large portion of the eastern part of the island but did not control it. The only Tamil-controlled areas were in the far north, including the Jaffna Peninsula and a small area around it.

When the British were forced out of South Asia and left Ceylon, the Tamils remained on the island. The Tamils now make up only 10 percent of the population and live mainly in the northeastern region of the island. They have been pressuring the Sinhalese majority to split the island politically and grant them independence. An insurgent civil war was waged for decades between the Tamil guerillas—called the **Tamil Tigers**—and the Sinhalese government. About sixty to eighty thousand people died in this conflict. Originally only controlling the **Jaffna Peninsula**, the Tamil Tigers later made claims on a large portion of the northeastern part of the island. The Tamil Tigers created a government in the north called *Eelam* and wanted to legitimize it. The Sri Lankan president announced an end to the civil war in 2009, and the Tigers admitted defeat at that time. This civil war devastated Sri Lanka's tourism industry and discouraged foreign investments, further reducing economic opportunities for the island.

The Maldives

Just north of the Equator in the Indian Ocean to the southwest of India lie the Maldives, a group of low-lying islands that consists of twenty-six atolls encompassing a territory of only about 115 square miles. Within the atolls are approximately 1,200 small islands, of which about 200 are inhabited. Portugal controlled the Maldives from 1558 during their colonial expansion into Asia. Holland took over from the Portuguese in 1654. The Maldives became a British protectorate in 1887, which lasted until 1965, when independence was achieved. Three years later the country became a republic. The Maldives is a country with many extremes. It is Asia's smallest nation in both physical area and population. The island nation has the smallest physical area of any country with a majority Muslim population. The average elevation—four feet, eleven inches above sea level—is the lowest in the world for any country.

Fishing and tourism are the chief methods for Maldivians to earn a living. Tourism has increased in recent years. The many islands and atolls are attractive destinations for world travelers. The first tourist resort opened in 1972. Since that time, dozens of world-class resort facilities have opened for business across the archipelago. Tourism is the country's number one means of gaining wealth. The coral reefs that make up the island chain are excellent for diving and water sports. The tropical climate and miles of sandy beaches provide for an attractive tourism agenda.

The Maldives is an example of an entire country that could be in danger of flooding because of climate change if polar ice melts and sea levels rise. Concerns over the future of the islands gave reason for the president of the country to announce a plan in 2008 to purchase land in other countries in case sea levels rise to a point where the Maldives are no longer habitable. The purchase of land from tourism receipts would provide a place for the Maldivians to move in case they had to evacuate the islands. The administration of the Maldives has worked hard to lobby the international community to address the increase in greenhouse gas emissions and the possibility of an increase in sea level caused by the global warming aspect of climate change.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Punjab is a highly productive agricultural region located partly in Pakistan and partly in India. The region is home to the Sikh population, which has proposed having its own nation-state.
- Kashmir is divided between Pakistan, China, and India. The religious differences and the control of a valuable water source are at the core of this conflict.
- Nepal borders the Himalayan Mountains and has an economy based on agriculture and tourism. High population growth has been stripping the land of trees, causing serious deforestation issues and soil erosion.
- The Kingdom of Bhutan has placed major restrictions on tourism to protect its environment and limit outside influences on its culture.
- The beautiful tropical island of Sri Lanka experienced a low-level civil war for decades between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and the Tamil Hindu minority. The island has an excellent location and potential for economic development.
- The archipelago of the Maldives is a small country that depends on tourism for its economic survival. The low elevation of its land area makes it subject to flooding due to the effects of climate change.

DISCUSSION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is the Punjab region vital to both Pakistan and India?
2. What has been one political goal of the Sikhs living in the Punjab?
3. What three countries control parts of the Kingdom of Kashmir?
4. Why is the region of Kashmir vital to South Asia's viability?
5. Why is Bhutan so selective about admitting tourists?
6. Explain Bhutan's guiding philosophy regarding development.
7. Why is Nepal experiencing environmental degradation?
8. What was the civil war about in Sri Lanka? What did each side want?
9. What is it about each country listed that is attractive to the tourism industry?
10. What plan was announced to address the Maldives's environmental concerns?

GEOGRAPHY EXERCISE

Identify the following key places on a map:

- Jaffna Peninsula
- Lumbini
- Mt. Everest
- Polk Strait
- Tarai lowlands

9.3 Pakistan and Bangladesh

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Outline how Pakistan and Bangladesh are similar in their populations and economic dynamics but different in their physical environments.
2. Understand why the two countries were once under the same government and separated in 1972, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh.
3. Describe the various regions of Pakistan and their physical and cultural landscapes.
4. Comprehend the impact that large populations have on the natural environment and outline the main environmental issues that confront these two countries.

Pakistan and Bangladesh are two separate and independent countries physically divided by India. Historically, this was not always the case: from 1947 to 1971 they were administered under the same government. The two countries share a number of attributes. They both have Muslim majorities and both have high population densities. The countries are two of the top ten most populous countries in the world. Their populations are youthful and mainly rural; agriculture is the main economic activity in each country. Rural-to-urban shift is a major trend affecting urban development. Infrastructure is lacking in many areas of each country. These similar factors indicate that both Pakistan and Bangladesh will face comparable challenges in providing for their large populations and protecting their natural environments.

The Muslim League was responsible for the formation of a united Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim state for South Asian Muslims. Pakistan was created from the former Indian territories of Sindh (Sind), North West Frontier Provinces, West Punjab, Baluchistan, and East Bengal. Pakistan was formed with two separate physical regions, defined by religious predominance. East Bengal, on the eastern side of India, was known as East Pakistan, while the remainder, separated by more than one thousand miles, was known as West Pakistan. The two physical units were united politically.

East and West Pakistan, administered by one government, became independent of their colonial master in 1947, when Britain was forced out. Pakistan (East and West) adopted its constitution in 1956 and became an Islamic republic. In 1970, a massive

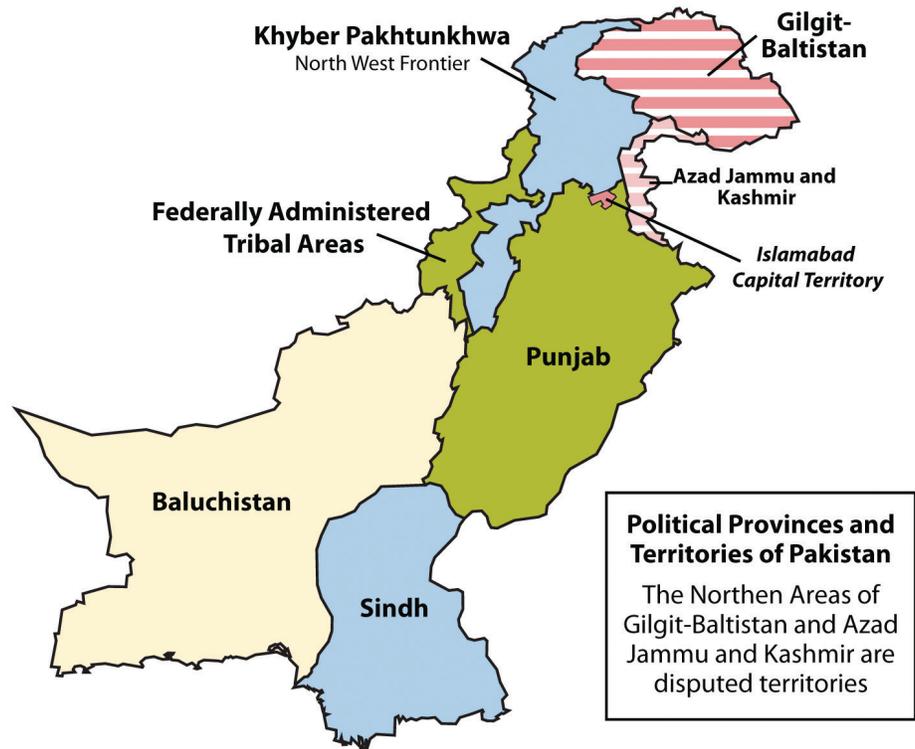
cyclone hit the coast of East Pakistan and the central government in West Pakistan responded weakly to the devastation. The Bengali populations were angered over the government's lack of consideration for them in response to the cyclone and in other matters. The Indo-Pakistan War changed the situation. In this war, East Pakistan, with the aid of the Indian military, challenged West Pakistan and declared independence to become Bangladesh in 1972. West Pakistan became the current country of Pakistan.

Pakistan

The physical area of Pakistan is equivalent to the US states of Texas and Louisiana combined. Much of Pakistan's land area comprises either deserts or mountains. The high Himalayan ranges border Pakistan to the north. The lack of rainfall in the western part of the country restricts agricultural production in the mountain valleys and near the river basins. The Indus River flows roughly northeast/southwest along the eastern side of Pakistan, flowing into the Arabian Sea. River sediments are deposited in large areas found between river channels and oxbow lakes formed from the constantly changing river channels. These "lands between the rivers" are called "**doabs**"⁶ and represent some of the most fertile land in the Indian subcontinent. The Indus River flows from the northern part of the Karakoram mountains and creates a large, fertile flood plain that comprises much of eastern Pakistan. Pakistan has traditionally been a land of farming. The Indus River Valley and the Punjab are the dominant core areas where most of the people live and where population densities are remarkably high.

6. Silt deposits formed by changing river channels along the Indus River in Pakistan.

Figure 9.14



The two core areas of Pakistan are the Punjab and the Indus River Valley.

Source: Map courtesy of CIA World Factbook.

Approximately 64 percent of the population lives in rural areas and makes a living in agriculture. Most of the people are economically quite poor by world standards. In spite of the rural nature of the population, the average family size has decreased from seven to four in recent decades. Nevertheless, the population has exploded from about 34 million in 1951 to about 187 million as of 2011. About half of the population is under the age of twenty; 35 percent is under the age of fifteen. A lack of adequate medical care, an absence of family planning, and the low status of women have created an ever-increasing population, which will have dire consequences for the future of Pakistan. Service and infrastructure to address the needs of this youthful population are not available to the necessary degree. Schools and educational opportunities for children are rarely funded at the needed levels. As of 2010, only about 50 percent of Pakistan's population was literate.

The capital of Pakistan when it was under British colonialism was Karachi, a port city located on the Arabian Sea. To establish a presence in the north, near Kashmir, the capital was moved to Islamabad in 1960. This example of a *forward capital* was an expression of geopolitical assertiveness by Pakistan against India. The lingua franca of the country for the business sector and the social elite continues to be English, even though Urdu is considered the national language of Pakistan and is used as a lingua franca in many areas. More than sixty languages are spoken in the country. There are as many ethnic groups in Pakistan as there are languages. The three most prominent ethnic groups are Punjabis, Pashtuns, and Sindhis.

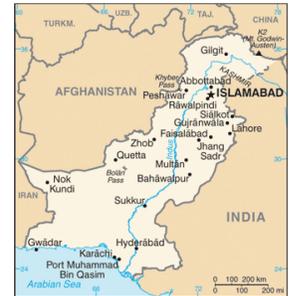
Regions of Pakistan

The three main physical geographic regions of Pakistan are the Indus River Basin, the Baluchistan Plateau, and the northern highlands. These physical regions are generally associated with the country's main political provinces. The four main provinces include the **Punjab**, **Baluchistan** (Balochistan), **Sindh** (Sind), and **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** (North West Frontier). To the north is the disputed region of Kashmir known as the **Northern Areas**. Each of these regions represents a different aspect of the country. The North West Frontier has a series of **Tribal Areas** bordering Afghanistan that have been traditionally under their own local control. Agents under Tribal Agencies have attempted to administer some type of structure and responsibility for the areas, with little success.

The Punjab

As explained previously, the Punjab is a core area of Pakistan, and has about 60 percent of Pakistan's population. The five rivers of the Punjab border India and provide the fresh water necessary to grow food to support a large population. Irrigation canals create a water management network that provides water throughout the region. The southern portion of the Punjab includes the arid conditions of the **Thar Desert**. The northern sector includes the foothills of the mountains and has cooler temperatures in the higher elevations. The Punjab is anchored by the cities of **Lahore**, Faisalabad, and Multan. Lahore is the cultural

Figure 9.15 The Provinces and Territories of Pakistan



Source: Updated from map courtesy of Schajee, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PAK_AU_T1.svg.

Figure 9.16 Donkey Cart on Busy Street in Lahore, Pakistan, in the Punjab



center of Pakistan and is home to the University of the Punjab and many magnificent mosques and palaces built during its early history. In the 1980s, many Punjabis migrated to Europe, the Middle East, and North America seeking opportunities and employment. This diaspora of people from the Punjab provided cultural and business ties with Pakistan. For example, trade connections between the Punjab and the United States are increasing. The Punjab is the most industrialized of all the provinces. Manufacturing has increased with industries producing everything from vehicles to electrical appliances to textiles. The industrialization of the Punjab is an indication of its skilled work force and the highest literacy rate in Pakistan, at about 80 percent.

This is an example of traditional transportation mixing with modern technology. Lahore is a large city with a wide range of methods of conducting business.

Source: Photo courtesy of Guilhem Vellut, http://www.flickr.com/photos/o_0/10070267.

Baluchistan

Baluchistan (Balochistan) encompasses a large portion of southwest Pakistan to the west of the Indus River. The region connects the Middle East and Iran with the rest of Asia. The landscape consists of barren terrain, sandy deserts, and rocky surfaces. Baluchistan covers about 44 percent of the entire country and is the largest political unit. The sparse population ekes a living out of the few mountain valleys where water can be found. Local politics provides the basic structure for society in this region. Within the Baluchistan province of Pakistan are several coastal and interior rivers; the interior rivers flow from the Hindu Kush Mountains of Afghanistan, while most of the rivers along the coastal deserts from west of Karachi to the Iranian border are seasonal in nature and provide one of the few sources of fresh water in those coastal regions. Much of the coastal region is arid desert with sand dunes and large volcanic mountainous features.

Figure 9.17 Man with His Camel in the Desert Region of Baluchistan in Western Pakistan



Source: Photo courtesy of Kashif Muhammad Farooq, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/kashiff/2592800506>.

The Sindh

The Sindh (Sind) region of the southeast is anchored by **Karachi**, Pakistan's largest city and major port. The Indus River is the border on the west and the Punjab region lies to the north. To the east of the Sindh is the border with India and the great Thar Desert. The Sindh is a region that misses out on the rains from the summer monsoon and the retreating monsoon season, when the winds sweep in

from the north over South Asia. The city of **Hyderabad, Pakistan**, is located along the Indus River, which is a key food-growing area. Food crops consist of wheat and other small grains, with cotton as a major cash crop that helps support the textile industry of the region.

Hyderabad, Pakistan, is not to be confused with a large city with the same name in India.

Rural-to-urban shift has pushed large numbers of Sindh residents into the city of Karachi to look for opportunities and employment. In previous sections, slums and shantytowns have been described and explained for cities such as Mexico City and São Paulo; Karachi has similar development patterns. The central business district has a thriving business sector that anchors the southern part of the country. The city has a large port facility on the Arabian Sea. As a city of twelve to fifteen million people or more, there are always problems with a lack of public services, law enforcement, or adequate infrastructure. Urban centers usually have a strong informal economy that provides a means for many of the citizens to get by but is outside the control of the city or national government. The Sindh is the second-most populous region of Pakistan, after the Punjab.

Figure 9.18 Female Doctor Examining Patient from a Mobile Medical Clinic in the Sindh Region of Pakistan



Source: Photo courtesy of UK Department for International Development, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/5331065350>.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (The North West Frontier)

The North West Frontier is a broad expanse of territory that extends from the northern edge of Baluchistan to the Northern Areas of the former Kingdom of Kashmir. Sandwiched between the tribal areas along the Afghanistan border and the well-watered lands of the Punjab, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province is dominated by remote mountain ranges with fertile valleys. The famous **Khyber Pass**, a major chokepoint into Afghanistan, is located here. The frontier is a breeding ground for anti-Western culture and anti-American sentiments, mainly fueled by the US military activity in Afghanistan. The Taliban movement that once

Figure 9.19 Man Firing AK-47 in the North West Frontier of Pakistan



controlled the government of Afghanistan has been active and generally more organized in this region than in Afghanistan. A push for more fundamentalist Islamic law has been a major initiative of the local leaders. Support for education and modernization is minimal. The government of Pakistan has also stepped up its military actions in the region to counter the activities of the militant Islamic extremists.

Source: Photo courtesy of Kai Hendry, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hendry/73370895>.

The Tribal Areas

The North West Frontier borders the Tribal Areas, where clans and local leaders are standard parts of the sociopolitical structure. These remote areas have seldom been fully controlled by either the colonial governments (the British) or the current government of Pakistan. There are about seven main areas that fall under this description. Accountability for the areas has been difficult and even when the national government stepped in to exercise authority, there was serious resistance that halted any real established interaction. These remote areas are where groups such as al-Qaeda and the Taliban often find safe haven. South and North Waziristan are two of the main areas that have been controlled by Tribal Agencies and not directly by the Pakistani government.

Northern Areas with Disputed Kashmir

Pakistan's Northern Areas include the territories that were once part of the Kingdom of Kashmir, the boundaries of which are disputed with India. The region is, in other words, interconnected with the issues related to Kashmir that involve Pakistan, India, and China. There are two main political entities: the large northern section bordering Afghanistan is called **Gilgit-Baltistan**, and the narrow section near Islamabad is called **Azad Kashmir** (Azad Jammu and Kashmir). The Northern Areas are highlands, bordered to the north by the towering Karakoram and Pamir mountain ranges. K2, the world's second highest mountain, which reaches 28,250 feet, is located here. The Northern Areas are sparsely populated except for the Indus River valley. The conflicts over these territories fuel nationalistic forces in both Pakistan and India. The conflicts are as much between Islam and Hinduism as they are between political factions. The early war between India and Pakistan over the border that the British placed between them in 1947 almost seems to be reenacted in the more recent conflicts over the region of Kashmir.

Figure 9.20 *The Highlands of the Northern Areas in Pakistan*



Source: Photo courtesy of Tore Urnes, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/urnes/2663083945>.

Religion and Politics in Pakistan

Today most of the people living in Pakistan are Muslim. About 85 percent of the Muslim population in Pakistan is Sunni and about 15 percent of the Muslim population is Shia, which is consistent with the percentages of the two Islamic divisions worldwide. Islam is considered the state religion of Pakistan. The state is a federal republic with a parliamentary style of government. As an *Islamic state* following the Sharia laws of the Koran, it has been a challenge for Pakistan to try to balance instituting democratic reforms while staying true to fundamental Islamic teachings. Pakistan has held elections for government leaders, and the status of women has improved. Women have held many governmental and political positions, including prime minister. The military has been a foundation of power for those in charge. As a result of weak economic conditions throughout the country, it has been the military that has received primary attention and is the strongest institution within the government. Pakistan has demonstrated its nuclear weapons capability in recent years, which established it as a major player in regional affairs.

Pakistan has suffered from inadequate funding for public schools. As a rule, the wealthy urban elites have been the only families who could afford to send their

children to college. With half the population consisting of young people, there are few opportunities to look forward to in Pakistan. Education has been supported in the form of Islamic religious schools called **madrassas**⁷, which teach children the Koran and Islamic law. Much of the funding for religious schools comes from outside sources such as Saudi Arabia. The result is a religious education that does not provide the skills needed for the modern world. Pakistan has worked to build schools, colleges, and universities to educate its people. The situation is that population growth has been outpacing what little budget was allocated for educational purposes.

The government of Pakistan has struggled to meet the challenge posed by the democratic structure of its constitution. The combination of a federal republic and an Islamic state creates a unique and at times difficult balance in administrative politics. The legislative body of Pakistan consists of a National Assembly and a Senate. The leader of the National Assembly is the prime minister. The elected president not only is in charge of the military but is also head of state. The military establishment and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency hold major political power in Pakistan. The political leadership has often vacillated between military and civilian rule. Transitions between the two types of leadership have been conducted through civil unrest or political demonstrations in the streets.

7. Private religious schools that teach the Koran and Islamic Law.

Benazir Bhutto: The First Female Prime Minister of Pakistan

Women's roles in Pakistani leadership have been complex. To understand the impact of electing the first woman prime minister in Pakistan, one has to go back to 1972. At that time, East Pakistan gained its independence and changed its name to Bangladesh. At roughly the same time, Pakistan elected President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to power. After ruling for five years, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was ousted from power and sentenced to death by General Zia, who became the next president. General Zia was the first military general to also be president. He allowed the Islamic Sharia law to be introduced into the legal system, which bolstered the influence of Islam on the military and government services. In 1988, General Zia was killed in an unexplained plane crash. The daughter of the first president—Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—was then elected as prime minister. The thirty-five-year-old Benazir Bhutto was the first female prime minister of Pakistan.

Benazir Bhutto's tenure as prime minister was short-lived. After a year and a half, the president removed her from office on accusations of corruption. She ran again in 1993 and was reelected to the prime minister position. Charges of corruption continued and she was removed as prime minister a second time in 1996. Political corruption, or the accusations of such a charge, is not uncommon in Pakistan or other countries with volatile political situations. To keep from being prosecuted by her opposition, Benazir Bhutto left Pakistan in 1998 and lived in Dubai. She did not return to Pakistan until 2007, under an agreement reached with the military general who was president at the time, General Pervez Musharraf. Benazir Bhutto was given amnesty for any and all claims against her.

Figure 9.21



Benazir Bhutto visits the United States in 1989 while she was the prime minister of Pakistan.

*Source: Photo courtesy of SRA
Gerald B. Johnson, US
Department of Defense,
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/
wiki/
File:Benazir_bhutto_1988.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benazir_bhutto_1988.jpg).*

The elimination of the corruption charges against her allowed Benazir Bhutto to become a candidate for the office of president. She organized an effective campaign. Her campaign for the presidency energized the political landscape of the country. In December of 2007, her campaign was cut short. Benazir Bhutto was assassinated after departing a political rally. She was assassinated a few weeks before the polls were to open for the election. Benazir Bhutto was the leading opposition candidate. Her death rallied support against General Musharraf with continued calls for his removal from office. General Musharraf resigned from the presidency in 2008. The winner of the presidential elections that followed was none other than Benazir Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari. President Zardari blamed the Taliban for the assassination of his wife.

Environmental Issues in Pakistan

Pakistan is confronted with severe environmental issues. One of the concerns is a fault zone that runs directly through the region. Pakistan's regions are divided by the Eurasian tectonic plate and the Indian tectonic plate. Shifting tectonic plates

cause earthquakes; there have been several major ones in Pakistan's recent history. For instance, an earthquake of 7.6 magnitude in 2005 in the northern region of the North West Frontier claimed about eighty-nine thousand lives in Pakistan and a few thousand others in neighboring India and Afghanistan. About 150 aftershocks were felt the next day, many of which were over the 6.0 level on the Richter scale. This particular event in 2005 was listed as the fourteenth most devastating earthquake on record at the time. It left over three million people without a home in Pakistan alone and more people were left homeless in neighboring areas. Hardest hit outside of Pakistan was the portion of Kashmir that is controlled by India. Many countries, including the United States, stepped up and supported the aid effort to reach people in the devastated region. Major earthquakes that cause devastation for the large populations here are common along this tectonic plate boundary.

Another environmental issue in Pakistan is water pollution. Raw sewage discharges into the rivers and streams and contaminates the drinking water for many Pakistanis. Most of the population lives in rural areas and relies on natural untreated water for their consumption. The water sources are heavily polluted, triggering disease and health problems. The urban areas lack public water works to handle fresh water supplies or to dispose of sewage properly. Industrial wastes and agricultural runoff also pollute and damage water supplies. Floods and natural runoff can carry pollutants from the land or urban areas into the rivers and streams that are used by human communities. The net effect of all these factors is that a majority of Pakistan's population lacks safe drinking water.

Deforestation is another environmental problem in Pakistan, because the demand for wood for cooking fuel and building is on the rise. Only about 2.5 percent of Pakistan is forested. In the last two decades, Pakistan has lost about one-fourth of its forest cover. The removal of forests causes widespread soil erosion during heavy rains and decreases natural habitat for organisms and wild animals. Efforts to protect the biodiversity of the country have been minimal and are complicated by the increase in population, which is expected to double in about forty-five years if population growth remains on its current trajectory. The reality is that deforestation is likely to continue in Pakistan, with little hope of a solution anytime soon.

Figure 9.22 *Helping Pakistanis*



A US Army soldier and Pakistani troops help Pakistani residents as they disembark from a US Army helicopter in Khwazahkela, Pakistan, as part of relief efforts to help flood victims on August 5, 2010. Heavy rains forced thousands of residents to flee

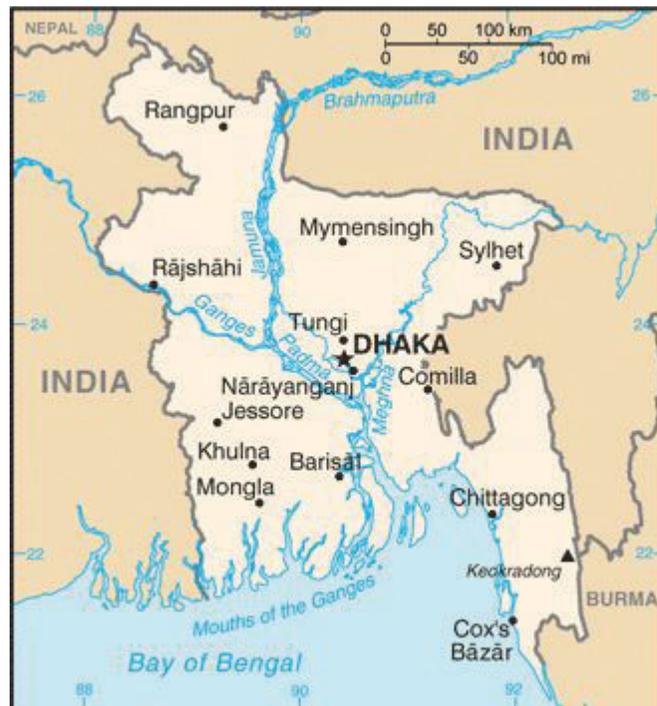
Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a low-lying country that is associated with the types of marshy environments found in tropical areas and river deltas. The region is extremely prone to flooding, particularly during the monsoon season because of the high amount of rainfall. One of the most important rivers of Bangladesh flows southward from the Himalayas through India and into Bangladesh. While in India, this river is known as the **Brahmaputra River**, but when it enters Bangladesh, it is known as the **Jamuna River**. It provides a major waterway for this region and empties into the **Bay of Bengal**.

rising flood waters. US forces partnered with the Pakistani military to coordinate evacuation and relief efforts.

Source: Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt Horace Murray, US Army, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/soldiersmediacenter/4878605031>.

Figure 9.23



Bangladesh has about the same geographical area as the US state of Wisconsin. Bangladesh's population estimate in 2011 was 158 million; Wisconsin's was about 5.6 million.

Source: Map courtesy of CIA World Factbook.

Contributing to the immense flow of water through the country are the Ganges and the **Meghna** rivers, which join up with the Brahmaputra River near the sea. The

Ganges flows through northern India and is a major source of fresh water for a large population before it reaches Bangladesh. The Meghna is a collection of tributaries within the boundaries of Bangladesh that flows out of the eastern part of the country. The Meghna is a deep river that can reach depths of almost two thousand feet with an average depth of more than one thousand feet. The hundreds of water channels throughout the relatively flat country provide for transportation routes for boats and ships that move goods and people from place to place. There are few bridges, so land travel is restricted when rainfall is heavy.

Population and Globalization

Imagine a country the size of the US state of Wisconsin. Now imagine half of the entire population of the United States living within its borders. Welcome to Bangladesh. With an estimated population of about 158 million in 2011 and a land area of only 55,556 square miles, it is one of the most densely populated countries on the planet. Most of the population in Bangladesh is rural, agriculturally grounded, and poor. The larger cities, such as the capital of **Dhaka**, have modern conveniences, complete with Internet cafes, shopping districts, and contemporary goods. The rural areas often suffer from a lack of adequate transportation, infrastructure, and public services. Poverty is common; income levels average the equivalent of a few US dollars per day. Remarkably, the culture remains vibrant and active, pursuing livelihoods that seek out every opportunity or advantage available to them.

There are many ethnic groups in Bangladesh, and many languages are spoken. The official and most widely used language in Bangladesh is Bengali (Bengala), which is an Indo-Aryan language of Sanskrit origin and has its own script. A Presidential Order in 1987 made Bengali the official language for the government of Bangladesh. Bengali is also the main language for the Indian state of West Bengal, which neighbors Bangladesh. English is used as the lingua franca among the middle and upper classes and in higher education. Many minor languages are spoken in Bangladesh and in the region as a whole. Most of the population, about 90 percent, is Muslim, with all but about 3 percent Sunni. There is a sizable minority, about 9 percent, which adheres to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, or animism. The US State Department considers Bangladesh to be a moderate Islamic democratic country.

Bangladesh suffers from a demographic dilemma. Its tropical climate, availability of fresh water, and productive agricultural land have augmented a high population growth rate. The ever-increasing population is a growing concern. The government has stepped up its support for women's health, birth control, and family planning services. This is an Islamic country, but practical approaches and common sense in regard to population control have won out over Islamic fundamentalism, which has not always supported family planning. This poor and highly populated country has experienced political problems. Most of the people work in agriculture, while the remaining population is primarily concentrated in the service sector. Small business enterprises have been encouraged by the issuing of **microcredit**⁸, or small loans, to assist people in using their skills to earn income.

Figure 9.24 Street Scene in Dhaka, the Capital of Bangladesh



Source: Photo courtesy of Ben Sutherland,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bensutherland/2050055462>.

Globalization is evident in Bangladesh. As a result of the availability of cheap labor, sweat shops have been implemented to manufacture clothing for export to the world markets. The country also receives financial remittances from Bangladeshis working overseas in places such as the oil-rich region of the Middle East, which also is predominantly Muslim and is attracting cheap labor for its economic development projects funded by oil revenues. One example of how Bangladesh has been able to acquire materials such as steel is in the recycling of old ships. Shipping companies that have ships that are no longer viable for modern shipping have brought them to the shores of Bangladesh to be stripped down, taken apart, and the materials recycled.

Environmental Issues

The summer monsoons are both a blessing and a curse in Bangladesh. The blessing of the monsoon rains is that they bring fresh water to grow food. The northeast part of Bangladesh receives the highest amount of rainfall, averaging about eighteen feet per year, while the western part of the country averages only about four feet per year. Most of the rain falls during the monsoon season. Bangladesh can grow abundant food crops of rice and grain in the fertile deltas of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers, rivers that ultimately empty into the Bay of Bengal. About 55 percent of the land area is arable and can be used for farming, but flooding causes serious damage to cropland by eroding soil and washing away seeds or crops. Every year, countless people die because of the flooding, which can cover as much as a third of the country. One of the worst flooding events in Bangladesh's history was

8. Small loans extended to people without collateral to assist them in applying their skills to an economic enterprise.

experienced in 1998, when river flooding destroyed more than three hundred thousand homes and caused more than one thousand deaths, rendering more than thirty million people homeless.

Most parts of Bangladesh are fewer than forty feet above sea level, and the country is vulnerable to major flooding according to various global warming scenarios. Half of the country could be flooded with a three-foot rise in sea level. Storm surges from cyclones killed as many as one hundred fifty thousand people in 1991. In comparison, about two thousand people died when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2006. The high death toll from flooding does not receive its due attention from Western news media. Environmental concerns increase with the long-term projections of climate change. If sea level rises or if storms increase, then the low-lying agricultural lands of Bangladesh would suffer even more flooding and devastation. This would decrease the food supply of a growing population.

Another environmental problem for Bangladesh is deforestation. Wood is traditionally used for cooking and construction. The needs of a larger population have caused widespread deforestation. Brick and cement have become alternative building materials, and cow dung has become a widely used cooking fuel even though it reduces the fertilizer base for agriculture. Even so, these adaptations have not halted the deforestation problem. The main remaining forests are located along the southern borders with India and Burma (Myanmar) and in the northeast sector.

Bangladeshis suffer because of widespread water pollution from naturally occurring arsenic that contaminates water wells. The pyrite bedrock underneath much of western Bangladesh has large amounts of arsenic in it. Millions of people drink groundwater contaminated with this arsenic on a daily basis. Arsenic kills people slowly, by building up in their bodies, rotting their fingernails, giving them dark spots and bleeding sores. Arsenic is a slow killer and a carcinogen that increases the risk of skin cancer and tumors inside the body. Villagers in Bangladesh began being affected by these symptoms in the 1970s. In 1993, official tests indicated that up to 95 percent of the wells in one of the villages in the western region were contaminated. The widespread water contamination has also had a social cost. Reports indicate that husbands are sending their disfigured wives back to their families of origin, and some young people are remaining single. Stories are told of people who believe that the health

Figure 9.25 Man Working in a Rice Field in Bangladesh



Source: Photo courtesy of US Agency for International Development, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rice_Field.jpg.

problems are contagious or genetic and can be passed on to children, which causes dilemmas for women who are trying to find a husband.

Women and Banking in Bangladesh

Despite an overall languishing economy, economic success stories in this poor country do exist. The Grameen Bank has been working to empower women in Bangladesh for many years. The bank issues microcredit to people in the form of small loans. These loans do not require collateral. Loans are often issued to impoverished people based on the concept that many of them have abilities that are underutilized and can be transformed into income-earning activities. About 96 percent of these loans are to women, and the average loan is equivalent to about one hundred dollars. Women have proven to be more responsible than men in repaying loans and utilizing the money to earn wealth. The loan recovery rate in Bangladesh is higher than 98 percent. “Grameen Bank—Banking on the Poor,” Grameen Support Group, accessed November 14, 2011, <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/grameen-supportgrp.html>. Microcredit has energized poor women to use their skills to make and market their products to earn a living. More than five million women have taken out such loans, totaling more than five billion dollars. This program has energized local women to succeed. It has been a model for programs in other developing countries.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- When Britain's colonialism ended in South Asia in 1947, the Muslim League was instrumental in creating the united Muslim state with both East Pakistan and West Pakistan under one government. East Pakistan broke away and became the independent country of Bangladesh in 1972.
- Both Pakistan and Bangladesh have large populations that are increasing rapidly. Both countries have agriculturally based economies. Rural-to-urban shift is occurring at an ever-increasing rate in both countries. Population growth places a heavy tax on natural resources and social services.
- The political units within Pakistan include four main provinces. Tribal Areas border Afghanistan and are controlled by local leaders. The Northern Areas are disputed with India. Each of the provinces has its own unique physical and human landscapes.
- Earthquakes are common in Pakistan because the country is located on a tectonic plate boundary. Deforestation and water pollution are two other major environmental concerns.
- Bangladesh is a low-lying country with the Brahmaputra River, Ganges River, and the Meghna River flowing into the Bay of Bengal. Flooding is a major environmental concern that has devastated the country on a regular basis.

DISCUSSION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What happened to East Pakistan? Why did its name change?
2. Why does Pakistan have a forward capital? Where is it? Where did the capital used to be?
3. Compare the population density of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the United States.
4. What are the four main provinces of Pakistan? How are they different from each other?
5. How is Bangladesh affected by the summer monsoon? How much rain can it receive annually?
6. What are the main environmental problems in Pakistan? In Bangladesh?
7. What type of government does Pakistan have? What is the law based on?
8. How could both countries address their population growth situation?
9. Who was the first woman prime minister of Pakistan? What happened to her?
10. How has microcredit aided in the economic development of Bangladesh?

GEOGRAPHY EXERCISE

Identify the following key places on a map:

- Arabian Sea
- Azad Kashmir
- Baluchistan
- Bay of Bengal
- Brahmaputra River
- Ganges River
- Gilgit-Baltistan
- Hyderabad
- Indus River
- Karachi
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Khyber Pass
- Lahore
- Meghna River
- Northern Areas
- Punjab
- Sindh
- Thar Desert
- Tribal Areas

9.4 India

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Outline the basic activities of British colonialism that affected the realm.
2. Understand the basic qualities of the rural and urban characteristics of India.
3. Summarize the main economic activities and economic conditions in India.
4. Describe the differences between various geographic regions of India.
5. Explain the measures the Indian government has taken to protect the biodiversity of India.

India and Colonialism

India is considered the world's largest democracy. As the historic geography and the development patterns of India are examined, the complexities of this Hindu state surface. European colonizers of South Asia included the Dutch, Portuguese, French, and, finally, the British. In search of raw materials, cheap labor, and expanding markets, Europeans used their advancements in technology to take over and dominate the regional industrial base. The **East India Company** was a base of British operations in South Asia and evolved to become the administrative government of the region by 1857. The British government created an administrative structure to govern South Asia. Their centralized government in India employed many Sikhs in positions of the administration to help rule over the largely Muslim and Hindu population. The English language was introduced as a lingua franca for the colonies.

In truth, colonialism did more than establish the current boundaries of South Asia. Besides bringing the region under one central government and providing a lingua franca, India's colonizers developed the main port cities of **Bombay**, **Calcutta**, and **Madras** (now called **Mumbai**, **Kolkata**, and **Chennai**, respectively. The names of the port cities have been reverted to their original Hindi forms). The port cities were access points for connecting goods with markets between India and Europe. Mumbai became the largest city and the economic center of India. In 1912, to exploit the interior of India, the British moved their colonial capital from Kolkata, which was the port for the densely populated Ganges River basin, to **New Delhi**. Chennai was a port access to southern India and the core of the Dravidian ethnic south.

Britain exploited India by extending railroad lines from the three main port cities into the hinterlands, to transport materials from the interior back to the port for export. The Indian Railroad is one of the largest rail networks on Earth. The problem with colonial railroads was that they did not necessarily connect cities with other cities. The British colonizers connected rail lines between the hinterland and the ports for resource exploitation and export of commercial goods. Today, the same port cities act as focal points for the import/export activity of globalization and remain core industrial centers for South Asia. They are now well connected with the other cities of India.

Goa is the smallest state of modern-day India. In the sixteenth century, it was first encountered by Portuguese traders, who annexed it shortly thereafter to become a colony of Portugal, which it was for the next 450 years. Goa was one of the longest-held colonial possessions in the world, and was not annexed by India until 1961. By the mid-1800s, most of the population of this tiny area had been forcibly converted to Christianity. Although many Hindu traditions survived the colonial period, and Hindu holidays are celebrated here, Goa is known for its Christian holiday celebrations, especially Christmas and Easter. The cathedral and secular architecture in many of the historic buildings of Goa are European in style, reflecting its Portuguese origins.

The People of India

Contrasts in India are explicitly evident in the regional differences of its human geography. The north-south contrasts are apparent through the lingua franca and ethnic divisions. The main lingua franca in the north is Hindi. In the Dravidian-dominated south, the main lingua franca is English. The densely populated core region along the Ganges River, anchored on each end by Delhi/New Delhi and Kolkata, has traditionally been called the heartland of India. The south is anchored by the port city of Chennai and the large city of Bangalore. Chennai has been a traditional industrial center. The industrial infrastructure has shifted to more modern facilities in other cities, giving over to a “rustbelt” syndrome for portions of the Chennai region. India is a dynamic country, with shifts and changes constantly occurring. Any attempt to stereotype India into cultural regions would be problematic.

Figure 9.26 The Three Main Language Families in India



Hindi is the official language of the government, and both Hindi and English are the lingua franca.

Source: Updated from map courtesy of [historicaire](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asie.svg), <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asie.svg>; language data courtesy of University of Texas Libraries, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/india_lang_1973.jpg.

In 2010, India had more than 1.18 billion people, which is about one-sixth of the human population of the earth. An 80 percent majority follow Hindu beliefs. About 13 percent of the population is Muslim. Thirteen may not seem like a high percentage, but in this case it equates to about 140 million people. This is equivalent to all the Muslims who reside in the countries of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt combined. India is sometimes called the third-largest Muslim country in the world, after Indonesia and Pakistan, because of its large Muslim minority. India essentially has two lingua francas: English and Hindi, of which Hindi is the official language of the Indian government. India has twenty-eight states and fourteen recognized major languages. Many different languages are spoken in rural areas. The languages of northern India are mainly based on the **Indo-European** language family. Languages used in the south are mainly from the **Dravidian** language family. A few

regions that border Tibet in the north use languages from the **Sino-Tibetan** language family.

Urban versus Rural

Rural and urban life within the Indian Subcontinent varies according to wealth and opportunity. While concentrated in specific areas across the landscape, in general the population in rural areas is discontinuous and spread thinly. In urban areas, the populations are very concentrated with many times the population density found in rural areas. India has six world-class cities: Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad. There are many other large cities in India; in 2010, India had forty-three cities with more than a million people each.

India's interior is mainly composed of villages. In rural villages, much of the economy is based on subsistence strategies, primarily agriculture and small cottage industries. The lifestyle is focused on the agricultural cycles of soil preparation, sowing, and harvesting as well as tending animals, particularly water buffalo, cattle, goats, and sheep. About 65 percent of the population lives in rural areas and makes a living in agriculture. About 35 percent of the population—which is equal to the entire US population—is urbanized. India is rapidly progressing toward urbanization and industrialization. Changes in technology, however, tend to be slow in dispersing to the rural villages. More than half the villages in India do not have road access for motor vehicles. For residents of those villages, walking, animal carts, and trains are the main methods of transportation. Agricultural technology is primitive. Diffusion of new ideas, products, or methods can be slow. Modern communication technology is, however, helping connect these remote regions.

India's cities are dynamic places, with millions of people, cars, buses, and trucks all found in the streets. In many areas of urban centers, traffic may be stopped to await the movement of a sacred cow or a donkey or bullock cart loaded with merchandise. Indian cities are growing at an unsustainable rate. Overcrowded and congested, the main cities are modernizing and trying to keep up with global trends. Traditionally, family size was large. Large family size results in a swell of young people migrating to urban areas to seek greater opportunities and advantages. In modern times, family size has been reduced to about three children, an accomplishment that did not come easily because of the religious beliefs of most of India's people. If current trends continue, India will overtake China as the most populous country in the world in about fifty years.

Figure 9.27 Farmer Tilling a Field with Oxen in Rural India



The level of official governmental control is usually different in an urban setting from what it is in the rural areas. There may be more police or military personnel in areas of heavy traffic or in urban areas that need extra control. A central feature of many Indian cities is an older central city that represents the protected part of the city. In Delhi, for example, New Delhi represents the new construction of government buildings that was begun during the British occupation of the region as part of the British Empire. Old Delhi represents the old markets, government buildings, palaces, fortresses, and mosques that were built during the Mogul Empire, between the mid-1500s and the mid-1800s. These older parts of the cities, particularly the markets, are bustling with activities, merchants, shoppers, cab drivers, and pedal and motor rickshaws. Rickshaws are either bicycle-driven cabs or cabs based on enclosed motor scooters.

Source: Photo courtesy of antkriz, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ananth/136310496>.

In urban areas, there is a socioeconomic hierarchy of a small group of people who are wealthy and can afford all the amenities we associate with modern life—electricity, clean water, television, computers, and the like. One of the things that characterize modern Indian cities is an expanding middle class. Many young people see the kinds of material goods that are available in the West and are creating job markets and opportunities to allow them to reach or maintain this type of lifestyle. One of the major markets to support this burgeoning middle class is the information technology field, as well as outsourcing in many of the cities of peninsular India.

India is a country with considerable contrast between the wealthy urban elites and the poor rural villagers, many of whom move to the cities and live in slums and work for little pay. Low labor costs have enabled Indian cities to industrialize in many ways similar to Western cities, complete with computers, Internet services, and other modern communications services. India's growing middle class is a product of educational opportunities and technological advancements. This available skilled labor base has allowed India's industrial and information sectors to take advantage of economic opportunities in the global marketplace to grow and expand their activities. Development within India is augmented by outsourcing activities by American and European corporations to India. Service center jobs created by **business process outsourcing (BPO)**⁹ are in high demand by skilled Indian workers.

9. Relocation of business tasks to another country where labor costs are lower. The term has mainly been applied to business involving digital data that can be transferred through high-speed Internet and communications technology.

India's Economic Situation

In the past decade, India has possessed the second fastest growing economy in the world; China is first. India's economy continues to rapidly expand and have a tremendous impact on the world economy. In spite of the size of the economy,

India's population has a low average per capita income. Approximately one-fourth of the people living in India live in poverty; the World Bank classifies India as a low-income economy. India has followed a central economic model for most of its development since it declared independence. The central government has exerted strict control over private sector economic development, foreign trade, and foreign investment. Through various economic reforms since the 1990s, India is beginning to open up these markets by reducing government control on foreign investment and trade. Many publicly owned businesses are being privatized. Globalization efforts have been vigorous in India. There has been substantial growth in information services, health care, and the industrial sector.

The economy is extremely diverse and has focused on agriculture, handicrafts, textiles, manufacturing, some industry, and a vast number of services. A 60 percent majority of the population earns its income directly from agriculture and agriculture-related services. Land holdings by individual farmers are small, often less than five acres. When combined with the inadequate use of modern farming technologies, small land holdings become inadequately productive and impractical. Monsoons are critical for the success of India's agricultural crops during any given season. Because the rainfall of many agricultural areas is tied to the monsoon rains of only a few months, a weak or delayed rainfall can have disastrous effects on the agricultural economy. Agricultural products include commercial crops such as coffee and spices (cardamom, pepper, chili peppers, turmeric, vanilla, cinnamon, and so on). An important product for perfume and incense is sandalwood, harvested primarily in the dense forests of the state of Karnataka, in southwestern India. Bamboo is an important part of the agricultural harvest as well. Of course, rice and lentils provide an important basis for the local economy.

Figure 9.28 Mumbai (Bombay), the Economic Capital and Largest City in India



Source: Photo courtesy of BOMBMAN, http://www.flickr.com/photos/ajay_g/1516457856.

Over the last two decades, information technology and related services are transforming India's economy and society. In turn, India is transforming the world's information technologies in terms of production and service as well as the export of skilled workers in financial, computer hardware, software engineering, and software services. Manufacturing and industry are becoming a more important part of India's economy as it begins to expand. Manufacturing and industry account for almost one-third of the gross domestic product (GDP) and contribute jobs to almost one-fifth of the total workforce. Major economic sectors such as

manufacturing, industry, biotechnology, telecommunications, aviation, shipbuilding, and retail are exhibiting strong growth rates.

A large number of educated young people who are fluent in English are changing India into a “back office” target for global outsourcing for customer services. These customer services focus on computer-related products but also include service-related industries and online sales companies. The level of outsourcing of information activity to India has been substantial. Any work that can be conducted over the Internet or telephone can be outsourced to anywhere in the world that has high-speed communication links. Countries that are attractive to BPO are countries where the English language is prominent, where employment costs are low, and where there is an adequate labor base of skilled or educated workers that can be trained in the services required. India has been the main destination for BPO activity from the United States. Firms with service work or computer programming are drawn to India because English is a lingua franca and India has an adequate skilled labor base to draw from.

Tourism has always been an important part of India’s economy and has been focused on the unique natural environments as well as historical cities, monuments, and temples found throughout the country. Of particular importance are the Mogul-period tombs, palaces, and mosques in Delhi, **Agra**, and **Jaipur**, India’s “Golden Triangle” of tourism. India is a country of contrasts. Scenic beauty abounds from the Eastern and Western Ghats to the high mountains of the Himalayas. The monsoon rains provide abundant agricultural crops for densely populated regions such as the Ganges River basin. On the other hand, places such as the Thar Desert are sparsely inhabited. There is a wide gap between the wealthy elite and the massive numbers of people who live in poverty. Mumbai has some of the largest slums in Asia, yet it is the financial capital of India, teeming with economic activity.

Figure 9.29 Triplets in India Utilizing High-Tech Communication Technology



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As incomes rise for the middle class in India, the price of automobiles becomes more accessible. On the downside, an escalation in the numbers of motor vehicles in use tends to lead to an escalation in the levels of air pollution and traffic congestion. Similarly, an expansion of transportation systems increases the use of fossil fuels. India is a major competitor for fossil fuels exported from the Persian Gulf and other Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) sources. The continued industrialization and urbanization in India foretells an increase in demand for energy. Rising energy costs and demand, combined with economic growth, have caused a serious problem for India. Many areas will be without power

as they are shut off the power grid for hours or days, a process known as load-shedding. This allows industry and manufacturing to use the energy resources during peak times. In general, India is poor in natural gas and oil resources and is heavily dependent on coal and foreign oil imports. India is rich in alternative energy resources, such as solar, wind, and biofuels; however, alternative energy resources have not been sufficiently developed.

Vehicle Manufacturing

Two examples of India's growing economic milieu are motor vehicle manufacturing and the movie industry. India's vehicle manufacturing base is expanding rapidly. Vehicle manufacturing companies from North America, Europe, and East Asia are all active in India, and India also has its own share of vehicle manufacturing companies. For example, Mumbai-based **Tata Motors Ltd.** is the country's foremost vehicle production corporation and it claims to be the second-largest commercial vehicle manufacturer in the world. Tata Motors is India's largest designer and manufacturer of commercial buses and trucks, and it also produces the most inexpensive car in the world, the Tata Nano. Tata Motors manufactures midsized and larger automobiles, too. The company has expanded operations to Spain, Thailand, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. The company is an example of an Indian-based international corporation that is a force in the global marketplace. In 2010, India was recognized as a major competitor with Thailand, South Korea, and Japan as the fourth main exporter of autos in Asia.

Figure 9.30 *The Nano, Made in India*



The Nano is considered the world's most inexpensive car.

Source: Photo courtesy of High Contrast,
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tata_Nano_im_Verkehrszentrum_des_Deutschen_Museums.JPG.

The Indian Cinema

Cinema makes up a large portion of the entertainment sector in India. India's cinema industry is often referred to as "**Bollywood**¹⁰," a combination of Bombay and Hollywood. Technically, Bollywood is only the segment of the Indian cinema that is based out of Bombay (Mumbai), but the title is sometimes misleadingly used to refer to the entire movie industry in India. Bollywood is the leading movie maker in India and has a world-class film production center. In the past few years, India has been producing as many as one thousand films annually. The highest annual output for the US film industry is only about two-thirds that of India. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, India's city of Hyderabad has the most

10. Indian film industry based in Mumbai; the title Bollywood is a combination of the names Hollywood and Bombay.

extensive film production center in the world. The Telugu film industry operates the studio in Hyderabad.

Indian films are produced in more than a dozen languages and appeal to a wide domestic and international audience. Indian movies range from long epic productions with stories within stories to dramas, musicals, and theatrical presentations. Their popularity extends beyond South Asia. Indian movies with modest dress, lack of explicit sexual scenes, and a focus on drama are popular in places such as Egypt, the Middle East, and other African countries. Movie stars are energetically promoted and enjoy celebrity in India, as is the case with the entertainment industry in the United States and Europe. The cinema is part of the cultural experience in Indian society. Urban life in India reserves a large presence for the entertainment industry, particularly the Indian film industry. One of the prime artistic endeavors in urban India is movie posters depicting all the glory of the latest Bollywood movie. Most of these colorful posters are painted by hand and they tend to be large; some are several stories high.

Figure 9.31



Bollywood is a major film production company located in Mumbai (Bombay). The film industry in India produces almost twice as many movies as the United States. Indian production scenes can be dramatic and expressive.

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India: East and West

South Asia's physical geography—an overview of its physical features—was described at the beginning of the chapter. India makes up the largest physical area of the South Asia realm. Another way of looking at the physical and human landscapes of India is to study spatial characteristics. Additionally, the economic side of the equation can be illustrated by dividing India between east and west according to economic development patterns. To do this, on a map of India draw an imaginary line from the border with Nepal in the north, near Kanpur, to the Polk Strait border with Sri Lanka in the south. This division of India illustrates two sides of India's economic pattern: an economically progressive West India and an economically stagnant East India.

Figure 9.32



India can be divided either along north/south dimensions or along east/west dimensions.

Source: Updated from map courtesy of CIA World Factbook.

The progressive western side of India is anchored by Mumbai and its surrounding industrial community. Mumbai is the economic giant of India with the country's main financial markets, and has been a magnet for high-tech firms and manufacturing. Mumbai's port provides access to global markets and is solidly connected to international trade networks. Auto manufacturing, the film industry, and computer firms all have major centers in the large urban metropolitan areas of the west. Large industrial cities such as Bangalore and Hyderabad have established themselves as high-tech production centers, attracting international business in the computer industry and the information sector. Chemical processing has been ongoing in **Bhopal**, which is noted for an environmental disaster, a gas leak in 1984 that resulted in the deaths of as many as ten thousand people. The nation's capital is located in New Delhi, which borders the massive city of (Old) Delhi. The western half of India has been progressing along a pattern with a positive economic outlook that views the global community outside of India as a partner in its success.

The eastern half of India has not been as prosperous as the west in its economic growth. The renowned city of Kolkata has traditionally anchored the eastern sector, but its factories have deteriorated into rustbelt status with aging and outdated heavy industries. The high-intensity labor activities of textile and domestic goods manufacturing are not as economically viable as they were in the past. The stagnant economic scene in the east is signified by the low average income levels of many of

the states in the eastern region. Neighboring Bangladesh offers little in support of economic growth, and Myanmar, another neighbor to the east, has its own set of problems and lacks support for East India. The eastern half of India does not have the strong partnerships with the global economy found in the west and thus relies more on internal resources for survival.

India: North and South

There are differences in the geographic patterns between the northern and southern halves of India as well as between the eastern and western halves—depending on the criteria used to compare them. Climate patterns, for example, are more diverse in the north, with a wide range of temperatures throughout the seasons. Winter temperatures in the mountainous north are cold and summer temperatures in the Thar Desert can be extremely high. Southern India has a more moderate range of temperatures throughout the year. The far north has high mountains. The south has only the low-lying Eastern and Western Ghats. The north has the extensive Ganges River basin. The south has different drainage networks based on the plateaus of the region.

Besides physical aspects, there are cultural differences between the north and south as well. India is a complex societal mix of many ethnic groups, languages, and traditions. Spatially separating the country into vernacular regions is not conducive to agreeable results. Still, there are some recognizable trends that have been stereotyped or commonly stated between the northern and southern parts of India. The north is portrayed as a faster-paced society, with more edge and competitiveness. The south has been portrayed as more relaxed and less insistent.

As the section on languages illustrated, Indo-European languages are mainly spoken in the north and Dravidian languages are predominantly spoken in the south. Hindi is more commonly the lingua franca of the north, while English is more frequently the lingua franca of the south. People in the north are of Indo-Aryan descent, while the people in the south have a Dravidian heritage. Hinduism dominates all of India, but the north has a wider diversity of religions, such as Sikhism, Buddhism, and Islam, practiced by a large number of people. The south has a substantial Christian population along its west coast.

Food is an important aspect of the culture of societies, and there are clearly distinctions between the cuisine of the north and of the south in India. Indian cooking is primarily vegetarian, emphasizing aspects of Hinduism. However, many dishes, particularly in North India, contain goat, chicken, lamb, fish, and other meats. Beef is not eaten by Hindus, while pork and some species of fish are not traditionally eaten by Muslims. North India has more wheat-based products and

less rice. Their dishes are prepared with spices and herbs, including black and chili peppers. Northern Indian food is characterized by its use of dairy products (yogurt; milk; paneer, or homemade cheeses; and ghee, or clarified butter). Onions, ghee, and spices are the common base for different types of salans or curries (gravies). Griddles are used for preparing different types of flat breads—chapattis, naan, and kulcha. Rice, lentils, and chickpeas are a staple part of the diet in North India.

Food in the southern parts of India includes more rice as a staple, and seafood (fish and prawns) is common along the coastal areas. Coconut oil is used as a basis for cooking. Sambar, a stew made of peas and vegetables, is an important staple of the region as are rice and idlis, which are a type of cake or bread made from steaming fermented black lentils. Chili peppers are also common in South Indian cooking.

Biodiversity and the Environment

Earlier sections have introduced the issues of population growth and resource depletion in South Asia. India has its share of the same environmental problems. Water pollution along the Ganges is severe and affects the largest concentration of people in India. India is the second-largest consumer of coal in the world, coal that is mainly burned to produce electricity. Burning coal adds significantly to air pollution. A rise in the number of vehicles in use, combined with few emission controls, also adds to the air pollution in urban areas. Deforestation continues in many rural areas, as was noted in earlier sections about Pakistan and Bangladesh.

India has a number of rare animal species that need habitat if they are going to survive. A few of the larger animals include the Indian Rhinoceros, Clouded Leopard, Indian Leopard, Snow Leopard, Asiatic Lion, Bengal Tiger, Asian Water Buffalo, Asian Elephant, Stripped Hyena, and the Red Panda. Many species are endangered or threatened along with many other lesser-known organisms. The high human population growth throughout South Asia places a strain on the natural habitat of wild animals. Habitat loss caused by human development makes holding on to the wide array of biodiversity difficult.

Figure 9.33



A meal of fish curry with rice and peppers can be found in South India.

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India has instituted measures designed to preserve its biodiversity. The Indian government has created sanctuaries for threatened or endangered species. National parks were established before India declared independence and were substantially expanded in recent decades. In 1972, The Wildlife Protection Act was instituted to create critical habitat for tigers and other rare species. There are hundreds of protected wildlife areas and fifteen biosphere reserves in India. Four of the biospheres were created in conjunction with the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

The Indian government has established protected areas throughout the country, many of which are in the highland regions and the northern mountains. For example, the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, including an area preserved for Asian Lions, is located on the Kathiawar Peninsula north of Mumbai, which juts out into the Arabian Sea. India is the only place left with Asian Lions in the wild. Tigers, elephants, rhinos, and leopards can be found in the sanctuaries. The country has about ninety-two national parks, which are also home to rare wildlife species, and more than three hundred fifty wildlife sanctuaries of all sizes. There are about twenty-eight tiger reserves in India. The country also has a number of marine reserves and protected areas along its coastlines.

The efforts of the Indian government to protect the country's biodiversity constitute an admirable environmental undertaking. The government has stepped up law enforcement efforts to combat poaching, which is a major cause of the decrease in numbers of rare species. Poachers kill animals such as tigers, leopards, elephants, and rhinos for their hides, horns, or body parts, which are sold on the black market in Asia for large sums of money. Many of the rare, threatened, or endangered species of India would not have a chance of survival without the government efforts to protect and provide for them. Balancing finding resources for rapid human population growth with wildlife management will continue to be a challenge in the years ahead for India and all countries of the planet.

Figure 9.34



The Indian Leopard is a near-threatened species that once lived throughout South Asia.

Source: Photo courtesy of Siddhartha Lammata, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/siddylam/4075338722>.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Colonialism had a tremendous impact on South Asia and its people. Colonial development patterns were implemented to control the people and to extract resources, not necessarily to benefit the realm.
- India has a wide disparity between its poor rural areas with agricultural economies and its wealthier bustling cities with expanding business sectors.
- Various urban centers of India have positioned themselves well to take advantage of the global economy and expand their manufacturing and industrial base. India is becoming a major manufacturing country for vehicles and high-tech industries.
- There are noticeable economic differences between the more progressive Western India and the stagnant economic conditions of Eastern India. There is also a noticeable cultural difference between the North and the South in India in the categories of language, ethnicity, food, and society.
- The Indian government has created national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and game reserves to help protect rare, threatened, or endangered species.

DISCUSSION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Outline the main ways in which British colonialism impacted South Asia.
2. What are the three main language families in India? What is the lingua franca?
3. List the main qualities that are different between the rural and urban areas of India.
4. How did British colonizers transport resources from the hinterland to the port cities for export back to Great Britain? How has this system changed since 1947?
5. Explain the various ways in which the rapid population growth is impacting India.
6. Why is India a major target for BPO?
7. List various ways the Indian film industry impacts India and the world.
8. How is economic development different between Western India and Eastern India?
9. Outline some cultural differences between the North and the South in India.
10. How has the government of India worked to protect the biodiversity of the natural environment? What are some of the animals that are being protected?

GEOGRAPHY EXERCISE

Identify the following key places on a map:

- Agra
- Bangalore
- Bombay (Mumbai)
- Bhopal
- Calcutta (Kolkata)
- Delhi
- Goa
- Hyderabad
- Jaipur
- Kathiawar Peninsula
- Madras (Chennai)
- New Delhi

9.5 Religions of India and South Asia

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Outline the basic religions of the realm. Name the largest minority religion.
2. Understand the basic structure and concepts of Hinduism, including the caste system.
3. Describe how Buddhism differs from Hinduism.
4. Summarize religions other than Buddhism and Hinduism that are prominent in India.

The realm of India and its surrounding countries is the native land for more than a few ancient religions. There are people in the realm who continue to adhere to animist beliefs who are not followers of any of the main world religions. The oldest world religions of India are Hinduism and Buddhism. Other important religions in the realm include Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and the Baha'i faith. India is at times labeled a Hindu state, but the accuracy of the label is dubious. A more suitable way to describe India is to say that it is a secular country where approximately 80 percent of the population follows Hindu traditions. Islam is the second-most popular religion, practiced by about 13 percent of the population. Christianity is India's third-largest religion, practiced by about 3 percent of the population. Sikhism accounts for about 2 percent of the population of India. Buddhism and Jainism are two other minority religions that have their origins in South Asia. And finally, there are still Indians who practice animist religions that predate all the other religions listed, especially in remote areas.

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest major religions still practiced. Its origins can be traced to ancient Vedic civilizations in India approximately three thousand years ago. The religion is found mainly in India, and it has the third-highest number of believers of religions in the world. Hinduism

Figure 9.35 Islamic Architecture in Hindu India



The Taj Mahal was constructed as a mausoleum for the wife of the ruler Shah Jahan in 1653 when the Muslim Mogul Empire controlled northern India. The Taj Mahal is located at Agra, India, and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Source: Photo courtesy of [particlem](http://www.flickr.com/photos/particlem/2466310898), <http://www.flickr.com/photos/particlem/2466310898>.

does not originate from a single teacher but from many traditions. The Hindu belief system consists of a number of schools of thought, with a wide variety of rituals and practices.

Hinduism has a vast body of written scripture that discusses theology, mythology, and philosophy as well as providing important guidance on the practice of dharma, religious or right living. These texts include the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. Other important scripts include the *Tantras*, the *Agamas*, the *Purānas*, and the epics of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*. The *Bhagavad Gitā* is a small part of the *Mahābhārata* that is a conversation between one of the Pandava brothers and the god Krishna, concerning the meaning of life and worthiness. This is often thought to be a summary of the spiritual teachings of the *Vedas*.

Predominantly, Hinduism follows the teachings of many gods or goddesses, frequently including a Supreme Being. While there are hundreds, if not thousands, of gods and goddesses, many are thought to represent different aspects of the same individual or Supreme Being. These individuals can be recognized by items that they are holding as well as by the vehicle or avatar that carries them. The three main deities and most widely venerated of the Hindu faith are **Shiva** the Destroyer, **Vishnu** the Preserver, and **Brahma** the Creator. There is a continuous cycle in which the original creation was accomplished by Brahma, Shiva destroys the universe, and Vishnu will recreate or preserve that universe from destruction. Different Hindu traditions have venerated each of the three main deities as the all-encompassing Supreme Being.

The polytheistic traditions of Hinduism consider a large number of deities or spiritual entities. Since there is no one creed or unified systems of beliefs, Hinduism has been referred to as more of a religious tradition than a religion. It has been said that Hinduism cannot be defined, but is instead experienced. This understanding allows a variety of beliefs to be included in the vast array of Hindu religious practices. There is actually freedom for the individual as to the form of worship or individual beliefs. The religion in general is more of a tradition and lifestyle with different avenues of practice. This allows for the diversity of spiritual deities or their manifestations within one Hindu faith.

Figure 9.36 Shiva Statue in Bangalore, India



Source: Photo courtesy of Andrea, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rivo/125806388>.

Hinduism is an extremely diverse religion, making it extremely difficult to define set doctrines that are accepted by all denominations. Within the wide spectrum of religious traditions are general concepts that are common to Hindu beliefs. Hindus believe in **Dharma**¹¹ (code of conduct or duty), **Samsara**¹² (reincarnation/rebirth), **Karma**¹³ (personal actions and choices), and **Moksha**¹⁴ (salvation) by belief in God and through an individual path of faith. **Reincarnation**¹⁵ is a cycle of death and rebirth for a soul to transmigrate through until it reaches Moksha. Karma governs how the soul is reincarnated. Actions in this life determine the soul's life cycle for the next life. Positive and upright works will draw one closer to God and a rebirth through reincarnation into a life with a wider consciousness or higher caste level. Evil or bad actions take the soul farther from God and into a lower form of worldly life or caste level. In the Hindu faith the eternal natural law applies to all life forms. The cycle of death and rebirth for the soul is necessary to reach the ultimate goal of reaching the universal divine spirit. Yoga is often used as a practice or path for following the traditions.

Pilgrimages are common in Hindu practice. Holy sites or temples are located throughout India and are regular destinations for the Hindu faithful. Pilgrimage is not required but is routinely conducted by a good number of Hindus. Besides many holy temples, a variety of cities and other holy places are pilgrimage destinations for Hindus. Varanasi, one such city, is considered by many as the holiest city of Hinduism, although other cities also hold this distinction. Located on the Ganges River, Varanasi is home to a large number of temples and shrines. The most visited shrine in Varanasi is one in honor of a manifestation of Shiva. Hindu festivals are held in Varanasi throughout the year, many along the banks of the Ganges. Varanasi is also one of the holiest places in Buddhism; it is said to have been designated by Gautama Buddha as one of four prime pilgrimage sites.

11. Various interpretations including a cosmic code of conduct, individual duty, or the right way in Eastern religions.
12. The cycle of reincarnation in many of the Eastern religions.
13. Personal deeds or actions that bring about the cycle of cause and effect.
14. Hindu term for salvation or the release from suffering and the end of the need for reincarnation.
15. Cycle of birth and death that the soul transmigrates through on the path to salvation or Nirvana.

Varanasi boasts more than one hundred ghats that provide access to the Ganges River. These ghats are not to be confused with the Eastern and Western Ghats that are highland ranges located along the coasts of India. For this application, a ghat is a term for a set of steps leading to the water. Some ghats are used for bathing, some for religious rituals, and others for the cremation of the dead. More than one million Hindu pilgrims visit Varanasi annually. Mother Ganga, as the river is referred to in Hinduism, is considered holy by many Hindu followers. Devotees ritually bathe in the river or take "holy" water from it home to ill family members. Some Hindus believe that the water can cure illnesses. Others believe that bathing in the Ganges will wash away your sins. The nonspiritual truth is that the Ganges is a highly polluted waterway. The water is not considered safe for human consumption by most universal health standards.

Figure 9.37 Ghat in Varanasi, India, where Hindu Faithful Access the Ganges River



Source: Photo courtesy of Rupert Taylor-Price, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rupertuk/534644162>.

Hindu Marriage Act

India's 1955 Hindu Marriage Act addresses the issues of marrying outside of one's religion or caste. The act proclaims that all Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus of any sect, creed, or caste level are considered as Hindus and can intermarry. A non-Hindu is allowed to marry a Hindu, with the provision that specific legal stipulations must be followed, regardless of the ceremony. Every Hindu marriage has to be witnessed by the Sacred Fire, in deference to Agni, the fire deity. To complete the marriage, the bride and groom must together encircle the Sacred Fire seven times.

Figure 9.38
Hindu Wedding Couple in India



Source: Photo used by permission of Dr. Mark Minor, 2006.

The Hindu Caste System

The exact origins of Hinduism and the **caste system**¹⁶ are unknown, but powerful nomadic Aryan warriors appeared in northern India about 1500 BCE. The Aryans conquered most of India at the time, including the Dravidian groups of central and southern India. They organized society into separate groups or castes. Every person was born into an unchanging group or caste that remained his or her status for the rest of his or her life. All lifetime activities were conducted within one's own caste. The caste a person was born into was considered to be based on what they had done in a past life. The caste system has evolved differently in different parts of Asia. Each Hindu branch has its own levels of castes, and thousands of sublevels have been established over time. In Hinduism, the basic system originated around five main caste levels:

16. Rigid social hierarchy based on Hindu traditions that people are born into based on their past lives.

1. **Brahmin:** priests, teachers, and judges
2. **Kshatriya:** warrior, ruler, or landowner
3. **Vaishya:** merchants, artisans, and farmers
4. **Shudra:** workers and laborers
5. **Dalits (Untouchables or Harijan):** outcasts or tribal groups

The **Dalits (Untouchables or Harijan)**¹⁷ traditionally worked in jobs relating to “polluting activities,” including anything unclean or dead. Dalits have been restricted from entering Hindu places of worship or drinking water from the same sources as members of higher castes. They often had to work at night and sleep during the day. In many areas, Dalits needed to take their shoes off while passing by upper-caste neighbors. Dalits could leave their Hindu caste by converting to Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam. The Indian government has implemented a positive affirmative action plan and provided the Dalits with representation in public offices and certain employment privileges. This policy has received harsh opposition by upper-caste groups. Technically, the caste system is illegal under current Indian law. Nevertheless, the opportunities that are available to the upper castes remain out of reach to many of the lowest caste. In some areas, education and industrialization have diminished the caste system’s influence. In other areas, Hindu fundamentalists have pushed for a stronger Hindu-based social structure and opposed any reforms.

Traditional socioeconomic status tends to be more important in rural areas, where the caste system is more formally adhered to. If you live in a community of millions of people, caste affiliations tend not to be important, but in a smaller, more rural community, these relationships and the status they hold can be very important, especially as many of the castes are associated with traditional village tasks, such as religious leaders, politicians, farmers, leather workers, or other activities.

Figure 9.39



17. The lowest level in the Hindu caste system. The term untouchables has been replaced by the term Dalits; Dalits is seen as being more appropriate. Gandhi used the term Harijan for this caste, meaning “Children of God.”

Is the Hindu caste system a centrifugal or centripetal cultural force for India?

Buddhism

Around 535 BCE in northern India, a prince by the name of Siddhartha Gautama broke from the local traditions that shaped Hinduism and taught religious salvation through meditation, the rejection of earthly desires, and reverence for all life forms. Siddhartha is recognized as the first Buddha. He taught that through many cycles of rebirth a person can attain enlightenment and no longer have a need for desire or selfish interests. Enlightenment is being free from suffering and is reaching a state of liberation often referred to as **Nirvana**¹⁸. Buddhism is considered a “dharmic” faith that concerns following a path of duty for a proper life. According to Buddhism, life is dictated by karma, which connects our actions with future experiences. Buddhism spread across the Indian Subcontinent after the sixth century BCE and became the region’s dominant religion within 1,500 years. However, since that time, the religion has diminished in the Indian Subcontinent, although it has seen some revival under the influence of Buddhist scholars. Buddhism predominates in the northernmost areas of India.

Buddhism is the majority religion in Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and most of Southeast Asia. It was prominent in China, Mongolia, and North Korea before their governments adopted Communist ideology. Communist governments officially announced that their countries were nonreligious, although many people still followed religious systems. Various branches of Buddhism have developed, with many schools established within each branch. Buddhism can be divided geographically into southern, northern, and eastern Buddhism. Scholars and Buddhists practitioners may arrive at various methods of classification of the various schools of thought within the Buddhist faith; the geographic basis of recognition provides only one way to understand the variations within the religion. One feature common throughout all branches of the faith is that Buddhism does not have caste levels.

Figure 9.40 Statue of Buddha at Bodh Gaya, India



Source: Photo courtesy of Man Bartlett, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/manbartlett/3731927920>.

The southern branch of Buddhism is known as Theravada Buddhism (*the Teaching of the Elders*), most prominent in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. This branch, referred to as the oldest branch of Buddhism, attempts to follow the original Buddha’s teachings. Meditation and concentration are seen as keys to enlightenment. Spiritual forces do exist but it is up to the individual to attain his or her own path toward awakening.

18. State of freedom from suffering and the uniting with the Supreme Being in Eastern religions.

The northern variety of Buddhism is associated with the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition and is often called Tibetan Buddhism. It has its strongest allegiance in Tibet, Western China, Bhutan, Nepal, and parts of Mongolia. Rooted in the Buddha's original teaching, Northern Buddhism seeks to break out of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Spiritual techniques are often used, along with the main principle of meditation. Vajrayana Buddhism is considered by some to be a branch of Mahayana Buddhism.

In the east, the main form of Buddhism is the Mahayana tradition, which is most common in Japan, Taiwan, Korea, parts of Vietnam, and eastern China. There are various forms of the eastern traditions, including Zen Buddhism. Meditative in nature, there is a strong emphasis on universal compassion, altruism, and selflessness. Considered by many to be compatible with other religions, it is often touted as more a lifestyle than a religion. The meditative activities are often said to focus on calming the body and mind, which can provide a positive outcome for anyone seeking inner direction, even those following other religions.

All branches of Buddhism teach nonviolence, honesty, selflessness, tolerance, and moral living. Buddhism holds to the **Four Noble Truths**¹⁹ and the **Eightfold Path (The Middle Way)**²⁰ to enlightenment. Suffering is a standard component of humanity. Only through the Eightfold Path to enlightenment is freedom from suffering possible. Enlightenment comes through wisdom, ethical conduct, and meditation. Buddhism has become the world's fourth main religion, with most of its followers in Asia.

19. Buddhist principles that outline the end of suffering and the need for the Eightfold Path to enlightenment.

20. Buddhist principles that lead to the end of suffering and toward self-awakening and enlightenment.

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path

The Four Noble Truths

1. Suffering exists.
2. Suffering arises from attachment to desires.
3. Suffering ceases when desire ceases.
4. Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path.

The Middle Way or Eightfold Path

Attainable through wisdom

1. Right view
2. Right intention

Attainable through ethical conduct

3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood

Attainable through meditation

6. Right effort

7. Right mindfulness

8. Right concentration

Other Religions of South Asia

Islam

Islam diffused to South Asia from the Middle East through traders and merchants shortly after its creation. The Mogul Empire dominated northern India for centuries and is an example of the Islamic presence in the region. India has the largest Muslim minority in the world. In 2010, India had an estimated population of 140 million Muslims, which made up about 14 percent of the population. India has the third-largest Muslim population in the world, after Indonesia and Pakistan. Most Muslims in India live in the north along the Ganges River Basin and in Nepal. There is also a large Muslim population in eastern India near the border with Bangladesh. Kashmir, in northern India, also continues to hold a significant Muslim population.

Christianity

Christianity is India's third-largest religion, practiced by about 3 percent of the population. Christianity is a monotheistic religion following the teachings of Jesus Christ that originated in the Middle East. Tradition has it that Christianity first came to India through first-century CE missionary activity linked to the Apostle Thomas, and later arrived to other parts of India through the activities of western missionaries from 1500 CE onward. A major Christian stronghold is the state and city of Goa on the southwest coast, a colony of Portugal from the 1500s to the mid-1900s. There is also a strong Christian presence in eastern India, in the region bordering Myanmar.

Jainism

Jainism or Jain Dharma is a spiritual, religious, and philosophical tradition in India that dates back to about the ninth century BCE. Jains (followers of Jainism) believe that their religion's origins extend back to the distant past. A Jain is a follower of Jinas (the saints), who are humans who have rediscovered the dharma (or the way) and have become fully liberated. These Jinas can then teach this spiritual path to other people. A major characteristic of Jainism is the emphasis on the consequences of physical and mental behavior. There are about five million Jains in India, and others around the world.

Great care must be taken while going about one's daily life, as Jains believe that everything is alive and that many beings (including pests such as insects) possess a soul. All life is considered worthy of respect and all life is equal and deserves protection, especially the life of the world's smallest creatures. While in India, you can recognize Jains, because many of the strictest adherents will wear masks to prevent themselves from inhaling insects and thus destroying the insects' souls. Jains are a religious minority, with around five million followers in modern-day India.

All followers of Jainism are vegetarians. Their diet is part of the practice of nonviolence at the heart of their religion. They will eat only food items such as fresh fruit, vegetables, cereals, and legumes. Most root vegetables such as potatoes and onions are avoided by the more devout because of the harm that would be done to the plants themselves or other organisms in the soil when the roots are pulled. Additionally, Jainists will not eat honey, consume any food that may have fermented overnight, or drink water that has not been filtered.

Sikhism

Sikhism was previously discussed in the section on the Punjab, the region at the center of the Sikh community. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion centered on justice and faith. In Sikhism, salvation can be obtained through devotion to God and through disciplined meditation. There is a high importance placed on the principle of equality between all people in the Sikh religion. There should be no discrimination on the basis of gender, creed, caste, or ethnicity; every person is equal. The writings of former Sikh gurus are the basis for the religion. The center of the Sikh religion is found in the Golden Temple, in the city of Amritsar, in the Punjab. This is where Sikhs gather to unite in the faith and associate with each other. There are about twenty-six million Sikhs in the world, and about three-fourths of them live in the Punjab state of India.

Baha'i Faith

The Baha'i Faith is found in many large urban areas of the Indian Subcontinent, particularly New Delhi, where a large temple complex is found. This temple is commonly known as the "Lotus Temple" based on its shape, which looks like a large lotus flower. Two million Baha'is live within India, which has the largest population of Baha'is in the world. Iran has the second-highest Baha'i population in the world. There is also a major Baha'i temple and center in Haifa, Israel. The Baha'i Faith was founded by Baha'u'llah in Persia (Iran)

Figure 9.41 Baha'i Faith's Lotus Temple in New Delhi



during the nineteenth century CE. This religion focuses on the spiritual oneness of humanity and the unity of the other major world religions.

India has the largest population of Baha'i in the world.

Zoroastrianism

Source: Photo courtesy of Ben Tubby, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:New_delhi_temple.jpg.

Zoroastrianism originated in Iran (or Persia); in fact, it was once the dominant religion of Greater Iran, but it has now dwindled to about two hundred thousand Zoroastrians around the world, with concentrations in Iran, India (primarily Mumbai), and Pakistan (primarily Karachi and Lahore). Zoroastrianism follows the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra or Zarthosht). This philosophy acknowledges the divine authority of Ahura Mazda (Mazdaism) as proclaimed by Zoroaster. One of the tangible forms of this religion is the use of fire as a purifying agent in ceremonies. The temples are commonly known as “fire temples.” Additionally, because of a prohibition of burials of bodies in the ground, Zoroastrians allow natural exposure of bodies to the elements in structures known as “Towers of Silence.” The greatest numbers of followers of Zoroastrianism can be found in India, with additional numbers in southern Pakistan.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Hinduism is one of the world’s oldest still-practiced religions. There is no one specific path in the religion. Hinduism is more of a religious tradition based on core concepts than it is a formal religion.
- The caste system is a Hindu practice of placing people in social layers with similar occupations, privileges, and status. The untouchables are the lowest caste.
- Buddhism was created around 535 BCE from the traditions that shaped Hinduism by Siddhartha Gautama, who taught religious salvation through meditation, the rejection of earthly desires, and reverence for all life forms. There is no caste system in Buddhism, which has a number of branches that vary throughout Asia.
- Islam and Christianity are the second- and third-largest religions in India but did not originate in South Asia. Jainism and Sikhism got their start in South Asia and are still practiced by millions of people. The Baha’i Faith and Zoroastrianism are also active in India.

DISCUSSION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the major religions in India in terms of population percentage?
2. What are four of the main concepts of Hinduism? How is yoga related to Hinduism?
3. Who are the three main deities in the Hindu tradition? What are each of these three associated with?
4. Is the caste system a centripetal force or a centrifugal force? In other words, does it divide or unite India?
5. What is the relationship between Hinduism and the Ganges River? What are ghats used for?
6. What is the caste system based on? How does one become a member of a caste level?
7. Does the United States have a caste system? What other countries or groups have caste-type levels?
8. What is the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism? Who started Buddhism, and when?
9. What are the three main branches of Buddhism, based on geographic location?
10. What are the general aspects of Jainism? How is this religion different from Islam?

9.6 End-of-Chapter Material

Chapter Summary

1. The Himalayan Mountain ranges border South Asia to the north. Nepal is located along this border and is somewhat of a buffer state between India and China. Nepal has a high population growth rate. Most of its people work in agriculture. Deforestation is a major environmental concern and causes erosion of the landscape. Landlocked and poor, Nepal struggles to maintain a stable government and adequate public services.
2. South Asia was colonized by Britain for ninety years. Colonialism brought a structured administration, a railroad system of transportation, and large port cities used for the export of goods from the interior. The political borders were established for South Asia by British colonizers, based on religious affiliation and economic advantages. The British elevated Sikhs from the Punjab to help rule over the Hindu and Muslim populations. English is widely used as a lingua franca.
3. Conflicts continue in mountainous Kashmir and tropical Sri Lanka. Kashmir's remote territory in the northern part of the realm is divided between Pakistan, China, and India. All three countries have nuclear weapons. Sri Lanka's majority Buddhist population is Sinhalese and is based in the southwest, controlling most of the island. Sri Lanka's minority Tamil population is Hindu and is based out of the Jaffna Peninsula in the northeast. The Tamil want their own country and have claims on the island.
4. Port cities of South Asia are centers for international trade and development. There is a wide disparity between the rural poor and the affluent elites. India has been developing a strong economy based on a growing information sector, health care, and manufacturing. Motor vehicles and computer technologies are emerging in India and competing worldwide. Pakistan's economy struggles under the high population growth and Islamic extremism in the country.
5. Pakistan and Bangladesh were once under the same government. Bangladesh was formerly East Pakistan. These Muslim countries have extremely high population densities and have agrarian economies. The Indus River flows through Pakistan and the two rivers of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges flow through Bangladesh. Monsoon flooding is a serious concern for Bangladesh; earthquakes have caused serious damage in Pakistan.
6. Hindu and Buddhist traditions first developed in South Asia. India has the most of the world's Hindu followers. The concept of the caste system has created socioeconomic layers in the culture that are being tempered by high urbanization rates. Buddhism has a number of branches that can be geographically identified as eastern, northern, and southern. Bhutan and Sri Lanka have Buddhist majorities. South Asia is also home to Sikhism and Jainism. Islam is strong in South Asia: Pakistan is the world's second-largest Muslim country, India has the world's third-largest Muslim population, and Bangladesh is a Muslim country as well. South Asia is also home to a Christian minority in addition to various other minority religious groups.