

Chapter 17: India

Summary

India is the most populous country on Earth and the largest country in South Asia, home to about 1.46 billion people in 2025. This chapter explains how such a big and varied country holds together: its constitution, its parliament and elections, its capital, and its 28 states and 8 union territories, many of them drawn around languages. You'll visit South India and Northeast India, meet India's Adivasi communities, and see how the idea of unity in diversity shows up in its national symbols, its money and its space program. Along the way you'll learn why one visitor from Hyderabad calls India "28 countries in one," and why that is both true and not quite true.

Concepts Covered

1. Republic of India
2. Constitution of India
3. Parliament of India
4. Elections in India
5. New Delhi
6. States and Union Territories
7. Linguistic States
8. Northeast India
9. South India

10. Adivasi Communities
11. Unity in Diversity
12. National Symbols of India
13. Indian Economy
14. Indian Rupee
15. ISRO

Prerequisites

- **Chapter 1: What Is South Asia?** for the eight countries and the land
- **Chapter 4: Colonialism, Independence, and Partition** for India's independence in 1947
- **Chapter 6: Languages and Scripts** for language families and the Eighth Schedule
- **Chapter 5: Faiths of South Asia** is helpful for the faiths mentioned here

One country, many homes



Hi, I'm Mora! India is where my own feathers come from: the peacock is India's national bird. If your family is from India, you've probably noticed that "Indian" can mean very different things to a cousin in Chennai and an uncle in Lucknow. If it isn't, India still touches your world in more ways than you might expect, even the phone in your pocket. This chapter helps you read the whole map, not just one corner of it.

17.1 "Like 28 Countries in One"

It's the first Saturday of the school year, and Arjun Reddy's cousin Kavya is visiting Minnesota from Hyderabad, in India. Arjun brings her to the South Asian Student Association's welcome picnic, where Zara Hossain is handing out samosas and Ben Lindqvist is handing out napkins (and eating most of the samosas).

Ben asks Kavya what India is like. She laughs. "Which part? India is like 28 countries in one. At home we speak Telugu. If I take the train to Bengaluru, the signs are in Kannada. My friend from Kolkata speaks Bengali, and my roommate from Delhi speaks Hindi. We all have to use English or Hindi to talk to each other sometimes." Zara jumps in: "Bengali? That's what my family speaks, and we're from Bangladesh." Kavya nods. "Exactly. Some of India's languages are also other countries' languages."

Ben is confused. He always thought India was one country with one language and one kind of food. Now he's hearing that it has dozens of languages, dozens of governments and a cousin who needs English to talk to her own roommate. So what holds India together, and what does Kavya mean by "28 countries in one"?

17.2 A Country the Size of a Continent

One way to picture it is the European Union, which has 27 member countries, more than 20 official languages, and about 450 million people. Each country has its own government, but they share some laws and many share a currency. Now imagine something with about three times as many people, more than 20 major languages, and 36 states and territories, but with one national government, one constitution, one army, one currency and one passport. That's India.

Or think about the United States, where Minnesota and Texas have their own governors and capitals inside one country. Now imagine if Minnesota's

official language were Swedish and Texas's were Spanish. That's closer to India, where many states were drawn around languages.

The Republic of India

The **Republic of India** is the official name of the country: a sovereign, democratic republic and a union of states, with an elected parliament and a constitution that has been in force since 1950. The constitution begins its very first article by naming the country twice: "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States." Bharat (भारत, *BHAH-rut*) is the Hindi name for India, borrowed from Sanskrit, and many Indians use it in everyday speech.

India became independent from British rule on 15 August 1947, as you saw in [Chapter 4](#). It became a republic, with an elected president instead of the British king as head of state, on 26 January 1950.

How many people?

India had **1,463,865,525 people in 2025** (about 1.46 billion, World Bank). It became the world's most populous country in 2023, passing China. About one in every six people on Earth lives in India.

Most Indians live in villages and small towns. In 2025, about 36% of Indians lived in cities, according to the World Bank. That still means hundreds of millions of city dwellers, in huge cities like Delhi, Mumbai (formerly Bombay), Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

India's last full census was taken in 2011. The next one is under way, with houses counted in 2026 and people counted in early 2027. Until it is finished, many of India's detailed numbers about religion and language come from 2011.

17.3 The Constitution of India

A rulebook for a billion people

The **Constitution of India** is the supreme law of the country: the document that sets up India's government, divides power between the center and the states, and lists the rights of every citizen. It was adopted on 26 November 1949 and came into effect on 26 January 1950, a day Indians celebrate every year as Republic Day. It is famous for being one of the longest written national constitutions in the world.

The constitution was drafted by a committee chaired by B. R. Ambedkar, a lawyer and scholar who was born into a Dalit family and fought against caste discrimination all his life. Among many other things, the constitution:

- makes all citizens equal before the law;
- abolishes "untouchability" (Article 17), so discrimination by caste is illegal;
- protects freedom of religion, speech and assembly;
- names Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of the Union, with English continuing for official use (Article 343);
- lists the Eighth Schedule of languages, which today has **22** languages ([Chapter 6](#)).

India is officially secular, which in India means the state has no official religion and treats all faiths equally. In the 2011 census, about 79.8% of Indians were Hindu, 14.2% Muslim, 2.3% Christian, 1.7% Sikh, 0.7% Buddhist and 0.4% Jain, with smaller Parsi, Jewish, Bahá'í and tribal-faith communities. India has one of the largest Muslim populations of any country in the world.

Federal, but with a strong center

India is a **federal** country: power is shared between the national government (often called "the center" or "the Union") and the state governments. The constitution lists which subjects belong to whom. Defense, foreign affairs and money belong to the center. Police, public health and farming mostly belong to the states. Education is shared. Under Article 345, each state can choose its own official language or languages. That rule is the key to the states you'll meet in Section 17.6.

The Indian system gives the center more power than the American one does. For example, Parliament can create new states, change state borders or rename states by an ordinary law.

Think about it



The constitution let each state pick its own official language. Why might that help a big, many-language country stay united, instead of pulling it apart? Keep your answer in mind for Section 17.7.

17.4 Parliament and Elections

The Parliament of India

The **Parliament of India** is the national legislature, the body that makes India's laws. It has two houses, plus the president:

House	Hindi name	Members	How they are chosen
House of the People	Lok Sabha (लोकसभा,	543 elected seats	Directly elected by voters, one member

House	Hindi name	Members	How they are chosen
(lower house)	<i>LOKE-sub-ha</i>		per constituency, at least every five years
Council of States (upper house)	Rajya Sabha	245 today, up to 250 allowed (12 appointed by the president)	Mostly elected by the members of state assemblies

India uses a **parliamentary** system, like the United Kingdom and unlike the United States. The prime minister, who runs the government day to day, is the leader of the party or coalition that controls a majority in the Lok Sabha. The president is head of state and has mostly ceremonial powers, acting on the advice of the prime minister and the cabinet.

As of October 2026, India's prime minister is Narendra Modi, in office since 2014 and in his third term, and its president is Droupadi Murmu, in office since 2022. President Murmu, from the Santal community, is the first person from a tribal community to hold the office. Parliament meets in New Delhi, in a new Parliament building opened in May 2023.

Elections in India

Elections in India are the regular votes, run by the independent Election Commission of India, in which adult citizens choose members of Parliament and of state assemblies. Every citizen aged 18 or older can vote.

The 2024 general election shows the size of it. Voting took place in seven phases between 19 April and 1 June 2024, and results were announced on 4 June. About 968 million people were registered to vote, and about 642 million voted, the largest number of voters in any election in history. Turnout at

polling stations was 65.79%, according to the Election Commission. The highest turnout was in Lakshadweep, at 84.16%, and the lowest in Bihar, at 56.19%.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 240 seats, short of a majority on its own, and formed a coalition government, the National Democratic Alliance, with 293 seats. The opposition alliance, called INDIA and led by the Indian National Congress, won 234 seats. Like any democracy's, India's politics is lively and argued over; this book describes how the system works and leaves the arguments to the news.

Each state also elects its own legislative assembly, which chooses a chief minister, the state's head of government.

17.5 New Delhi

New Delhi is the capital of India and the seat of its national government, home to Parliament, the President's House (Rashtrapati Bhavan) and the Supreme Court. It sits inside the larger city and union territory of Delhi, on the Yamuna River.

New Delhi is younger than it looks. Under British rule, Kolkata (then Calcutta) was the capital until 1911. That year, King George V announced that the capital would move to Delhi, an old imperial city that had been a Mughal capital ([Chapter 3](#)). British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker designed a new government district south of the old city, and New Delhi was inaugurated in 1931. After independence, the new republic kept it as the capital.

Delhi is a city of layers: Mughal monuments in Old Delhi, the colonial avenues of New Delhi, and huge modern suburbs where people from every state now live.

Delhi or New Delhi?



Delhi.

"Delhi" is the whole city and union territory; "New Delhi" is the district inside it where the national government sits. If someone says India's capital is Mumbai, gently point out that Mumbai is the biggest business city, but the capital is New

17.6 States and Union Territories

Two kinds of pieces

India is divided into **States and Union Territories**: 28 states, which have their own elected governments and share power with the center, and 8 union territories, which are governed more directly by the national government. This is the count as of October 2026, according to the National Portal of India.

- A **state** has its own elected legislative assembly, a chief minister and a governor appointed by the president. It makes its own laws on state subjects.
- A **union territory** (UT) is run by an administrator appointed by the president. Some UTs, like Delhi, Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir, also have elected assemblies with limited powers.

Why have union territories at all? Some are small islands far from the mainland (the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep). Some were once ruled by France or Portugal and stayed separate after they joined India (Puducherry; Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu). Chandigarh is the shared capital of two states. Delhi holds the national capital. And Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh became union territories in 2019, as you'll see below.

All 36 at a glance

Here is the full list, with the capitals given by the National Portal of India. The languages are the main official ones; many states also have additional official languages for some districts or purposes.

State or UT	Type	Capital	Main official language(s)
Andhra Pradesh	State	Amaravati	Telugu
Arunachal Pradesh	State	Itanagar	English
Assam	State	Dispur	Assamese, Bodo (Bengali in the Barak Valley)
Bihar	State	Patna	Hindi (Urdu additional)
Chhattisgarh	State	Raipur	Hindi
Goa	State	Panaji	Konkani, English
Gujarat	State	Gandhinagar	Gujarati
Haryana	State	Chandigarh	Hindi
Himachal Pradesh	State	Shimla	Hindi (Sanskrit second)

State or UT	Type	Capital	Main official language(s)
Jharkhand	State	Ranchi	Hindi (many additional)
Karnataka	State	Bengaluru	Kannada
Kerala	State	Thiruvananthapuram	Malayalam
Madhya Pradesh	State	Bhopal	Hindi
Maharashtra	State	Mumbai	Marathi
Manipur	State	Imphal	Manipuri (Meitei)
Meghalaya	State	Shillong	English (Khasi and Garo associate)
Mizoram	State	Aizawl	Mizo, English
Nagaland	State	Kohima	English
Odisha	State	Bhubaneswar	Odia
Punjab	State	Chandigarh	Punjabi
Rajasthan	State	Jaipur	Hindi

State or UT	Type	Capital	Main official language(s)
Sikkim	State	Gangtok	Nepali, English and others
Tamil Nadu	State	Chennai	Tamil
Telangana	State	Hyderabad	Telugu (Urdu additional)
Tripura	State	Agartala	Bengali, Kokborok, English
Uttar Pradesh	State	Lucknow	Hindi (Urdu additional)
Uttarakhand	State	Dehradun	Hindi (Sanskrit second)
West Bengal	State	Kolkata	Bengali, English
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	UT	Sri Vijaya Puram (formerly Port Blair)	Hindi, English
Chandigarh	UT	Chandigarh	English
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	UT	Daman	Gujarati, Hindi (English used in

State or UT	Type	Capital	Main official language(s)
and Daman and Diu			administration; sources differ)
Delhi	UT (National Capital Territory)	Delhi	Hindi, English
Jammu and Kashmir	UT	Srinagar (summer), Jammu (winter)	Kashmiri, Dogri, Urdu, Hindi, English
Ladakh	UT	Leh	Bhoti, Purgi, Urdu, Hindi, English
Lakshadweep	UT	Kavaratti	English (Malayalam widely used)
Puducherry	UT	Puducherry	Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam (by area), plus English and French

The map has changed many times since 1947, and it changes still. Dadra and Nagar Haveli merged with Daman and Diu on 26 January 2020. In 2024 the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Port Blair, was renamed Sri

Vijaya Puram. In June 2025, a new regulation made Bhoti and Purgi official languages in Ladakh alongside Urdu, Hindi and English.

Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh

Until 2019, Jammu and Kashmir was a state with special autonomy under Article 370 of the constitution. In August 2019, India's government revoked that special status, and Parliament passed a law splitting the state into two union territories, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, from 31 October 2019. In December 2023, India's Supreme Court upheld the change and directed that statehood be restored to Jammu and Kashmir "as soon as possible." As of October 2026, both remain union territories.

These two territories are part of a much larger region whose status is disputed, as the box below explains.

Whose Story?

Ask someone in Delhi, Islamabad and Beijing to draw "Kashmir," and you'll get three different maps. In 1947 the Hindu ruler of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, with a Muslim-majority population, joined India during fighting with forces from Pakistan, and war followed. Today India administers about 55% of the region's land, Pakistan about 30% (Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan) and China about 15% (including Aksai Chin). India's position is that the whole former princely state is part of India. China's position is that Aksai Chin is part of China. Pakistan's position is that the region's future should be decided by its people through the vote the United Nations called for in 1948. Many Kashmiris themselves hold their own views, which do not always match either government's, and people of every community there have suffered through decades of conflict.

17.7 Linguistic States

How languages drew the map

Linguistic States are states whose borders were drawn so that most people inside share one main language, which usually becomes the state's official language. Most of India's states today are linguistic states.

At independence, India inherited a patchwork: big British provinces like Madras and Bombay that held speakers of several languages, plus more than 500 princely states. Many people wanted states that matched their languages, so that they could go to school, go to court and deal with officials in their own tongue. India's first leaders worried that language-based states might divide the country, and moved slowly.

In 1952, Potti Sriramulu, an activist demanding a separate state for Telugu speakers, died on the 58th day of a hunger strike. Protests followed, and in 1953 the government created Andhra State from the Telugu-speaking north of Madras State, the first state formed for one language. A States Reorganisation Commission followed, and the **States Reorganisation Act of 1956** redrew much of the map on linguistic lines from 1 November 1956. Kerala, for example, was created that day for Malayalam speakers.

The process continued:

Year	Change
1953	Andhra State formed for Telugu speakers
1956	States Reorganisation Act redraws the map; Kerala, Mysore (later Karnataka) and others formed around languages

Year	Change
1960	Bombay State split into Maharashtra (Marathi) and Gujarat (Gujarati) on 1 May
2000	Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand formed, more for regional and tribal identity than for language
2014	Telangana formed from Andhra Pradesh on 2 June, after a long regional movement; both states speak Telugu
2019	Jammu and Kashmir state split into two union territories

Notice the later changes. Telangana and Andhra Pradesh share the Telugu language, yet they split, because people in Telangana felt their region's history and needs were different. Language matters a great deal, but it isn't the only thing that makes people feel like a "state."

So was Kavya right that India is "28 countries in one"? In one sense, yes: many states have their own language, literature, film industry, food and festivals. But they are not countries. They share one constitution, one parliament and one army, and people move freely between them. Kavya can fly from Hyderabad to Kolkata without a passport.

Hindi, English and the language question

India's constitution named Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of the Union and planned for English to be phased out by 1965. In South India, especially in Tamil Nadu, many people strongly opposed having Hindi imposed on them. The Official Languages Act of 1963 settled the issue for the time being: English continues alongside Hindi for official purposes indefinitely.

How many Indians speak Hindi? In the 2011 census, about 43.6% of Indians named Hindi as their mother tongue. That number includes many related regional tongues, such as Bhojpuri and Braj, that the census groups under Hindi. So Hindi is the biggest single language, but more than half of India grows up speaking something else. Bengali came second, at about 8%.

17.8 South India

South India is the southern part of the peninsula, usually meaning the five states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, plus Puducherry and Lakshadweep, where the main languages belong to the Dravidian family.

The four big Dravidian languages are Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam, each with its own script, literature and film industry ([Chapter 6](#), [Chapter 15](#)). Dravidian languages are a completely different family from Hindi, which is Indo-Aryan, in the same way that Finnish is unrelated to Swedish even though Finland and Sweden are neighbors. That is why a Hindi-speaking student who moves to Chennai has to learn a whole new language.

South India has long faced the sea. Its ports traded with Rome, Arabia and Southeast Asia for centuries ([Chapter 3](#)). Kerala has old Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities whose faiths first reached its coast by sea, through trade. The south is also home to big technology cities, Bengaluru and Hyderabad, where many software companies have offices. Arjun's family is from Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana, and he dances Kuchipudi, a classical dance style named after a village in Andhra Pradesh ([Chapter 10](#)).

"South Indian" is a useful label, but it has limits: a family from Kochi and a family from Hyderabad may speak, eat, pray and celebrate quite differently.

17.9 Northeast India

Northeast India is the easternmost region of the country, made up of eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura (often called the "Seven Sisters") and Sikkim. It is connected to the rest of India by a narrow strip of land in West Bengal, the Siliguri Corridor, and it borders five countries: China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

The Northeast covers almost 8% of India's area but held only about 4% of its people in 2011. It is one of the most linguistically varied places on Earth. Many of its languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, related to Tibetan and Burmese rather than to Hindi or Tamil. Assamese and Bengali are Indo-Aryan, and Khasi in Meghalaya is Austroasiatic. Because no single local language is shared across Nagaland or Arunachal Pradesh, those states chose English as their official language.

Faiths vary widely too. Assam and Tripura have Hindu majorities and Assam has a large Muslim population. Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya have Christian majorities. Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh have important Buddhist communities. Many communities keep Indigenous faiths alongside or instead of these.

Many people from the Northeast who move to big Indian cities have reported facing prejudice and being treated as "foreigners" in their own country. This chapter treats the Northeast as a full part of India's story, not a footnote.

Not all Indians look alike



If a classmate says they're from India and they don't match the picture you had in your head, that picture is too small. India includes people from Ladakh, Nagaland, Kerala and Gujarat, and none of them is "less Indian" than the others.

17.10 Adivasi Communities

Adivasi Communities are India's Indigenous or tribal peoples, many of whom have their own languages, faiths, governance and ways of life tied to forests, hills and land. Adivasi (आदिवासी, *AH-dee-VAH-see*) means "original inhabitants" in Hindi. The government's official term is **Scheduled Tribes**, groups listed in a schedule under the constitution for special protection and support. Some officials avoid the word Adivasi, but many communities and activists use it with pride, and this book uses both respectfully.

In the 2011 census, about 104 million Indians, 8.6% of the population, belonged to Scheduled Tribes, and hundreds of different groups are listed. That is more than the entire population of most countries. Madhya Pradesh has the largest tribal population of any state (about 15 million in 2011), and in several northeastern states tribal peoples are the majority. Most live in rural areas.

Adivasi communities include the Santal, Gond, Bhil, Munda, Oraon and many more, with very different histories. Santali, an Austroasiatic language, was added to the Eighth Schedule in 2003. The state of Jharkhand was created in 2000 partly in response to a long movement for tribal self-rule; its first chief minister took office on 15 November 2000, the birth anniversary of the Munda leader Birsa Munda, who led a movement against British rule and the loss of tribal land in the 1890s.

Adivasi communities have faced serious problems, especially losing land and forests to dams, mines and other projects. They have also shaped Indian art, music and politics, and today an Adivasi woman, Droupadi Murmu, is president of India.

17.11 Unity in Diversity

Unity in Diversity is the idea that a country can hold many languages, faiths, peoples and cultures and still be one nation, with the differences seen as a strength rather than a threat. Indian leaders, schools and textbooks have used the phrase since independence to describe what India hopes to be.

You've already seen the diversity: 22 scheduled languages and hundreds more spoken; Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and others; deserts, rainforests, Himalayan valleys and coral islands. What provides the unity?

- **Shared institutions:** one constitution, one parliament, one Supreme Court and one election system.
- **Shared history:** the independence movement, which brought people from every region together against colonial rule.
- **Shared culture across lines:** cricket ([Chapter 15](#)), Hindi and regional films, festivals that neighbors of different faiths often celebrate together, and food that travels between states.

Unity in diversity is a goal, not an automatic fact. India has seen violence between religious communities, conflicts in Kashmir and parts of the Northeast, and arguments over language. Indians debate, loudly, how a big democracy should balance majority and minority, center and state. Those debates are part of how a diverse country works out living together.

17.12 National Symbols of India

National Symbols of India are the official emblems, chosen by the government, that stand for the country as a whole: a flag, an emblem, an anthem, a song, an animal, a bird, a flower and more.

Symbol	What it is	Adopted or notes
National flag	The tricolor, or tiranga (तिरंगा, <i>ti-RUNG-ah</i>): saffron, white and green bands with a navy blue wheel (the Ashoka Chakra) in the center	Adopted 22 July 1947
State emblem	Three lions from the Lion Capital of Ashoka at Sarnath, with the motto <i>Satyameva Jayate</i> , "Truth alone triumphs"	Adopted 26 January 1950
National anthem	"Jana Gana Mana," written in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore	Adopted 24 January 1950
National song	"Vande Mataram," by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee	Honored equally with the anthem
National animal	Tiger	
National bird	Indian peafowl (peacock)	Since 1963

Symbol	What it is	Adopted or notes
National flower	Lotus	
National calendar	The Saka calendar, used alongside the Gregorian calendar	Adopted 22 March 1957

Many of these symbols reach back into older history. The wheel on the flag and the lions on the emblem come from the reign of the emperor Ashoka in the 200s BCE ([Chapter 2](#)). The anthem connects India to its neighbors: Tagore also wrote "Amar Shonar Bangla," the national anthem of Bangladesh, which you'll meet in [Chapter 19](#).

17.13 The Indian Economy and the Rupee

The Indian Economy

The **Indian Economy** is the system of farms, factories, services and trade through which India's 1.46 billion people make and buy goods. It is huge in total but still modest per person. In 2025, India's gross domestic product (GDP), the value of everything produced in a year, was about 3.96 trillion US dollars, the sixth-largest in the world by the World Bank's figures in US dollars, close behind the United Kingdom. But because that output is shared among so many people, India's income per person (gross national income per person) was about 2,760 US dollars in 2025, according to the World Bank, far below that of the United States.

India's economy has many layers at once:

- **Farming** still employs a very large share of Indians, growing rice, wheat, cotton, sugarcane, tea and spices.
- **Services** are the biggest part of the economy, including software and IT companies in Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Pune, banking in Mumbai, and call centers that serve customers worldwide.
- **Manufacturing** includes cars, medicines and, increasingly, phones.
- **The informal economy:** millions of street vendors, small shops and family workshops that are not registered businesses.

Since economic reforms in 1991 opened India more to trade and investment, its economy has grown fast, and hundreds of millions of people have risen out of extreme poverty. At the same time, India still has many people living in poverty, and the gaps between rich and poor, and between booming and struggling states, are large.

The Indian Rupee

The **Indian Rupee** is India's currency, written ₹ and divided into 100 paise. The word "rupee" comes from the Hindi rupaya (रुपया, *ROOP-yah*), from a Sanskrit word for wrought silver. The rupee goes back to a silver coin called the rupiya, first issued by the ruler Sher Shah Suri between 1540 and 1545 and later by the Mughals, and several neighbors also call their money rupees: Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka all do.

The ₹ symbol is new. In 2010, India's government held an open competition for a rupee sign, and on 15 July 2010 it chose a design by D. Udaya Kumar, a young designer from IIT Bombay. The symbol blends the Devanagari letter र (ra) with the Latin letter R, and its two horizontal lines echo the flag. In October 2026, about 95 rupees bought one US dollar, according to Britannica.

17.14 ISRO and India in Space

ISRO, the Indian Space Research Organisation, is India's national space agency, which builds and launches rockets and satellites and sends missions to the Moon and beyond. It grew out of a space research committee set up in 1962, at the urging of the physicist Vikram Sarabhai, and took the name ISRO in 1969. Its headquarters are in Bengaluru, and it launches rockets from Sriharikota, an island on the coast of Andhra Pradesh.

ISRO is known for doing ambitious things on small budgets. Its satellites forecast weather, map crops, guide fishing boats and broadcast TV across the country.

Its most famous recent mission is **Chandrayaan-3** ("Moon craft"). Launched on 14 July 2023, it landed its Vikram lander near the Moon's south pole on 23 August 2023, and a small rover called Pragyan drove across the surface. India became the fourth country to land softly on the Moon, after the Soviet Union, the United States and China, and the first to land near the lunar south pole, a region scientists study because it may hold water ice. The rover's instruments confirmed sulfur in the soil near the pole.

Connect the dots

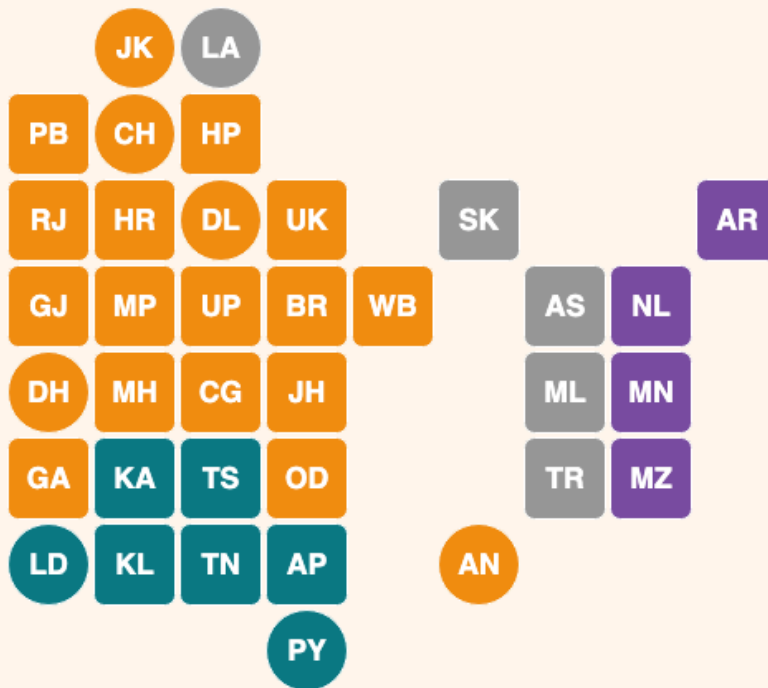


Chandrayaan-3 was built by engineers from many states and launched from Andhra Pradesh by an agency based in Karnataka. Why might a national science project like this be a good example of "unity in diversity"?

Diagram: India Explorer

India Explorer: 28 States and 8 Union Territories

Tap a tile for its capital and languages. Change the coloring in the menu.



Indo-Aryan Dravidian Tibeto-Burman Mixed families

Square = state. Round = union territory.

Schematic map, not to scale. Not an official depiction of borders.

JK and LA show the areas India administers. The wider Kashmir region is disputed among India, Pakistan and China.

India at a glance

Capital

New Delhi

Population (2025)

1,463,865,525 (about 1.46 billion), World Bank

Units

28 states and 8 union territories (2026)

Union languages

Hindi (Devanagari script) and English

Eighth Schedule

22 languages

Try this

Look at the Language family colors: most southern tiles share one color. Many states were drawn around languages in the 1950s. Then switch the menu to Region.

Language family Color the tiles by

☐ Highlight the 8 union territories

[Back to India Explorer Lesson Plan](#)

Interactive simulation: <https://aaryavvatts-lab.github.io/south-asian-culture-textbook/sims/ch17-india-explorer/main.html>

[Open the India Explorer fullscreen](#)

MicroSim specification: India Explorer

sim-id: ch17-india-explorer

Library: p5.js

Status: Implemented

Bloom Level: Understand

Bloom Verb: explain, classify

Learning Objective: The learner will explain how India's states and union territories connect to its languages, by classifying each one by language family and region.

Canvas: responsive width; 760 px drawing area plus 80 px control area.

Controls: "Color the tiles by" menu (Language family, Region); "Highlight the 8 union territories" checkbox; click or tap any tile.

Behavior: A tile cartogram shows 36 equal tiles (squares for the 28 states, rounded tiles for the 8 union territories), placed roughly where each sits in India, with no borders drawn. Tiles are colored by the language family of each place's main official language(s) (Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, mixed families) or by informal region. Tapping a tile shows its capital, official languages, family, region and a short note. A card summarizes India's capital, 2025 population (World Bank), 28 + 8 units and languages. The caption "Schematic map, not to scale. Not an official depiction of borders." and a neutral note that the wider Kashmir region is disputed appear inside the drawing area.

Start with the **Language family** coloring. Look at the teal block in the south (Dravidian) and the purple tiles in the northeast (Tibeto-Burman). Then tap Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Notice that each southern state has its own language, but they all belong to the same family. Now tap the gray tiles: Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim and Ladakh. Each one has official languages from two different families.

Then switch to **Region** and check **Highlight the 8 union territories**. Tap each union territory and ask why it isn't a state. Is it an island group, a former French or Portuguese territory, a capital city, or a place that changed in 2019? Finally, find Hyderabad in the Telangana tile and imagine Kavya's train ride to Bengaluru in Karnataka: how many tiles, and how many languages, would she pass?

Ask Your Elders

Your interview for this chapter

Talk with a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, family friend or community elder about the place in India their family comes from: which state, which language, and what makes it different from the rest of India. If your family isn't from India, ask an elder about a place in India they have visited or would like to visit. If you don't have a South Asian elder to ask, interview a club advisor, a local temple, mosque, gurdwara or cultural center volunteer, or a classmate's family (with permission). Ten minutes is enough.

Before you start: Pull up the India Explorer MicroSim on a phone or tablet so your elder can tap their home state. It gives you an easy way to start talking.

Questions to ask

1. Which state, city or village is our family (or your family) from? What is one thing you remember most about it?
2. Which language did you speak at home there? Which languages did you learn at school?
3. What food, festival or custom from your state do you think people from other states don't really know about?

4. When you met people from other parts of India, what surprised you about them, or about yourself?
5. How has your home state changed since you were young, or since you moved away?
6. What is one thing from your state that you hope I keep, even if I never live there?

Listen for: whether their state is one of the Linguistic States and which language it was drawn around; whether they are from South India, Northeast India or another region; and moments where they describe Unity in Diversity, like friends from different states or faiths celebrating together.

Save it: Write down one quote or story in their words, with their permission. If they agree, you can share it with the [Roots & Rivers Story Archive](#).

? Your turn: compare two answers

Find your elder's state in the table in Section 17.6. Does the official language there match the language your family speaks at home? If a friend interviewed someone from a different state, compare the two: what is different, and what do they share as Indians?

"Every family does it a little differently, and there is no wrong answer here."

Common Misconceptions

Myth: India has one culture.

Reality: India has 28 states and 8 union territories, 22 scheduled languages and hundreds more, and many faiths, cuisines and festivals. A family in Kerala and a family in Punjab can differ in language, food and customs as

much as Swedes and Spaniards do, while sharing one country, one constitution and a lot of history.

Myth: Everyone in India speaks Hindi.

Reality: Hindi is the largest language, but in the 2011 census only about 44% of Indians named it as their mother tongue. Most people in South India, Northeast India, West Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab and Odisha grow up speaking another language, and English is widely used to bridge the gaps.

Myth: India's capital is Mumbai.

Reality: The capital is New Delhi, inside the National Capital Territory of Delhi. Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, is India's biggest business and film city.

Myth: India is mostly big cities.

Reality: India has some of the world's largest cities, but in 2025 only about 36% of Indians lived in urban areas, according to the World Bank. Most Indians still live in villages and small towns.

Check Yourself

? 1. How many states and union territories does India have, and what is the difference between them? ✓

As of 2026, India has 28 states and 8 union territories. States have their own elected governments that share power with the center; union territories are governed more directly by the national government through an administrator, though some also have elected assemblies.

? 2. What is a linguistic state, and which was the first? ✓

A linguistic state is one whose borders were drawn around a shared language, which usually becomes its official language. Andhra State, formed in 1953 for Telugu speakers, was the first.

? 3. What are the two houses of the Parliament of India? ✓

The Lok Sabha (House of the People), with 543 directly elected seats, and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), mostly elected by state assemblies.

? 4. What happened on 23 August 2023, and why did it matter? ✓

ISRO's Chandrayaan-3 landed near the Moon's south pole. India became the fourth country to make a soft landing on the Moon and the first to land near the lunar south pole.

? 5. What are Adivasi communities, and what share of India's population did they make up in 2011? ✓

Adivasi communities are India's Indigenous or tribal peoples, officially called Scheduled Tribes. In the 2011 census they made up about 8.6% of the population, about 104 million people.

Exercises

Remember

1. Name India's capital, its 2025 population (World Bank) and the date its constitution came into effect.

 Answer

New Delhi; 1,463,865,525 (about 1.46 billion); 26 January 1950, celebrated as Republic Day.

2. List the eight states of Northeast India.

 Answer

Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.

Understand

1. Explain why Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh use English as their official language.

 Answer

Each is home to many peoples speaking many different languages, mostly Tibeto-Burman, with no single local language shared by everyone, so English works as a neutral common language for government.

2. Explain the difference between Delhi and New Delhi.

 Answer

Delhi is the whole city and the National Capital Territory, a union territory. New Delhi is the district inside it, built by the British and inaugurated in 1931, that holds Parliament and the national government.

Apply

1. Use the India Explorer MicroSim. Switch the coloring to **Language family** and list every gray ("mixed families") tile. For each, name the two families its official languages come from.

Hint: tap each gray tile and read the note.

2. A new student says her family is from Thiruvananthapuram and speaks Malayalam at home. Using the table in Section 17.6, write two sentences that show you know which state she is from and how that state got its borders.

Hint: think about 1 November 1956.

Analyze

1. Compare the creation of Telangana in 2014 with the creation of Andhra State in 1953. Why was language the main reason for one but not the other?

Hint: both states speak Telugu.

2. Kavya said India is "like 28 countries in one." Analyze what is accurate and what is misleading about that statement, using at least two facts from the chapter.

Hint: think about languages and governments, then about the constitution, Parliament and passports.

Evaluate

1. Some Indians argue that Hindi should be used more widely as a common national language; others, especially in South India, argue that this would

be unfair to non-Hindi speakers. Evaluate both positions and say which you find more convincing, and why.

Hint: use the 2011 census number and the history of the Official Languages Act of 1963.

2. India's national symbols include a flag, an emblem from Ashoka's era, an anthem in Bengali and a calendar. Evaluate how well this set of symbols represents a country of many languages and faiths. What would you add or change, and why?

Hint: look at where each symbol comes from.

Create

1. Design a "welcome to my state" poster for one of India's 36 states or union territories. Include its capital, its official language, one festival or food, and one fact that would surprise someone from another state.

Hint: start from the MicroSim card, then add from your own research or interview.

2. Write a short news report (150 to 200 words) of the Chandrayaan-3 landing as it might have been told in two different Indian languages' newspapers. What would be the same in both, and what local detail might each add?

Hint: use the dates and facts in Section 17.14.

Key Takeaways

- The Republic of India, with 1,463,865,525 people in 2025 (World Bank), is the world's most populous country; its constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950.

- India is a federal parliamentary democracy: the Lok Sabha's 543 seats are directly elected, and in 2024 about 642 million people voted in the largest election in history.
- India has 28 states and 8 union territories (2026), and its capital is New Delhi, inside the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- Many states are linguistic states, drawn around a shared language, beginning with Andhra State in 1953 and the States Reorganisation Act of 1956.
- South India's main languages are Dravidian, Northeast India's are largely Tibeto-Burman, and Hindi was the mother tongue of about 44% of Indians in 2011.
- Adivasi communities (Scheduled Tribes) made up 8.6% of Indians in 2011, and India's national symbols, economy, rupee and space program all reflect the goal of unity in diversity.
- Kashmir is disputed: India, Pakistan and China each administer part of the region, and their positions differ.

You toured India!



You can now explain how 36 states and territories, 22 scheduled languages and 1.46 billion people fit into one republic, and why Kavya's "28 countries in one" is half right.

Next, in Chapter 18, we cross India's western border to tour Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Quiz: India

Test your understanding of Chapter 17. Choose the best answer, then click **Show Answer** to check.

Question 1

As of 2026, how is India divided?

- A. 29 states and 7 union territories
- B. 28 states and 8 union territories
- C. 36 states and no union territories
- D. 22 states, one for each scheduled language

? Show Answer



The correct answer is **B**. India has 28 states and 8 union territories, according to the National Portal of India. The count of 29 states and 7 union territories was correct before 2019, when Jammu and Kashmir became a union territory and Ladakh was separated from it.

Concept Tested: States and Union Territories **Bloom's Level:** Remember

Question 2

When did the Constitution of India come into effect?

- A. 15 August 1947

- B. 26 November 1949
- C. 1 November 1956
- D. 26 January 1950

 Show Answer

The correct answer is **D**. The constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950, now celebrated as Republic Day. It was adopted on 26 November 1949, which is why option B is tempting, and 15 August 1947 is Independence Day.

Concept Tested: Constitution of India **Bloom's Level:** Remember

Question 3

What did ISRO's Chandrayaan-3 mission achieve on 23 August 2023?

- A. It made India the first country to land near the Moon's south pole.
- B. It made India the first country ever to land on the Moon.
- C. It put the first Indian astronaut on the Moon.
- D. It sent India's first spacecraft into orbit around Mars.

 Show Answer

The correct answer is **A**. Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander touched down near the lunar south pole, making India the fourth country to land softly on the Moon and the first near the south pole. It was not the first Moon landing overall: the Soviet Union, the United States and China landed first, and the mission carried no astronauts.

Concept Tested: ISRO **Bloom's Level:** Remember

Question 4

Which statement best explains what a linguistic state is?

- A. A state where English is banned from government use
- B. A state where everyone must learn Hindi first
- C. A state whose borders were drawn so that most people share one main language
- D. A state created for people who speak more than three languages

? Show Answer



The correct answer is **C**. Linguistic states were drawn around a shared language, which usually became the state's official language, starting with Andhra State in 1953. They do not require Hindi; in fact, many linguistic states have non-Hindi official languages such as Telugu, Tamil or Marathi.

Concept Tested: Linguistic States **Bloom's Level:** Understand

Question 5

Why do Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh use English as their official language?

- A. Because English is the only language taught in their schools
- B. Because each is home to many peoples with different languages and no single shared local language
- C. Because they were British colonies until 2000
- D. Because the constitution requires all northeastern states to use English

 Show Answer

The correct answer is **B**. These states are home to many communities speaking many languages, mostly Tibeto-Burman, so English works as a neutral common language. The constitution does not require it; each state chooses its own official language under Article 345.

Concept Tested: Northeast India **Bloom's Level:** Understand

Question 6

Which statement about Hindi in India is accurate?

- A. In the 2011 census, about 44% of Indians named Hindi as their mother tongue, so most Indians grow up speaking another language.
- B. Hindi is the mother tongue of almost every Indian.
- C. Hindi is the only official language of India's national government.
- D. Hindi belongs to the Dravidian language family.

 Show Answer

The correct answer is **A**. Hindi is the largest single language, but about 43.6% of Indians named it as their mother tongue in 2011. English continues alongside Hindi for national official use under the Official Languages Act of 1963, and Hindi is Indo-Aryan, not Dravidian.

Concept Tested: Unity in Diversity **Bloom's Level:** Understand

Question 7

A new classmate tells you her family is from Chennai and speaks Tamil at home. Using the chapter, which description fits her family's home region?

- A. Northeast India, where most languages are Tibeto-Burman
- B. A union territory governed directly from New Delhi
- C. The capital region, where Hindi and English are the official languages
- D. South India, where the main languages belong to the Dravidian family

 Show Answer



The correct answer is **D**. Chennai is the capital of Tamil Nadu, a state in South India, and Tamil is a Dravidian language. Tamil Nadu is a state, not a union territory, so option B does not fit.

Concept Tested: South India **Bloom's Level:** Apply

Question 8

Your club is making a poster about India's government. Which pair correctly describes India's leaders as of October 2026?

- A. President Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Droupadi Murmu
- B. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari
- C. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu
- D. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Rabindranath Tagore

 Show Answer

The correct answer is **C**. Narendra Modi is prime minister (in his third term) and Droupadi Murmu has been president since 2022. Option A swaps their offices, and option B names Pakistan's leaders.

Concept Tested: Parliament of India **Bloom's Level:** Apply

Question 9

Telangana was split from Andhra Pradesh in 2014, even though both states mainly speak Telugu. What does this case show?

- A. Language matters, but regional history and identity can also shape how states are drawn.
- B. The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 required every state to split in two.
- C. Telugu speakers do not live in Telangana.
- D. Linguistic states were abolished in 2014.

 Show Answer

The correct answer is **A**. Telangana's movement was about regional history and needs, not a different language, so it shows that language is only one reason states form. Linguistic states were not abolished, and Telugu is Telangana's official language.

Concept Tested: Linguistic States **Bloom's Level:** Analyze

Question 10

The India Explorer MicroSim draws Goa and Rajasthan as tiles of the same size. What is the best reason a tile cartogram is used instead of a traced map?

- A. Goa and Rajasthan really are the same size.
- B. Equal tiles make every state and territory easy to see and compare, and avoid drawing disputed borders.
- C. Tile cartograms show each state's exact population.
- D. Traced maps of India are not allowed to show capitals.

 Show Answer



The correct answer is **B**. Equal tiles let tiny places like Goa or Chandigarh be seen and tapped as easily as big ones, and a schematic layout avoids drawing official borders, including the disputed Kashmir region. Goa is actually India's smallest state by area, and Rajasthan its largest.

Concept Tested: States and Union Territories **Bloom's Level:** Analyze