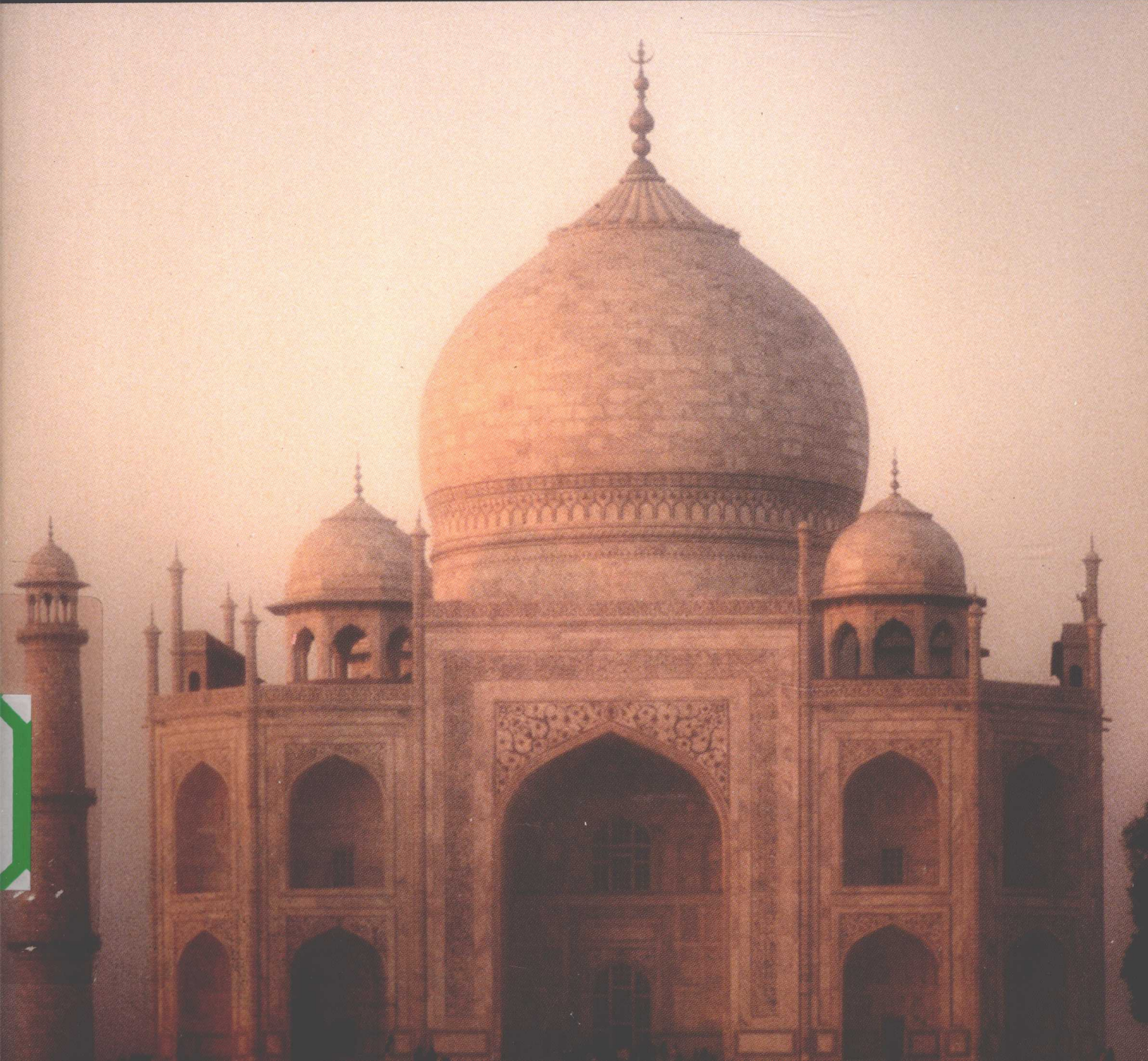


**GLOBAL  STUDIES**

# **INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA**

**SIXTH EDITION**



**GLOBAL  STUDIES**

# **INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA**

**SIXTH EDITION**

**Dr. James H. K. Norton**

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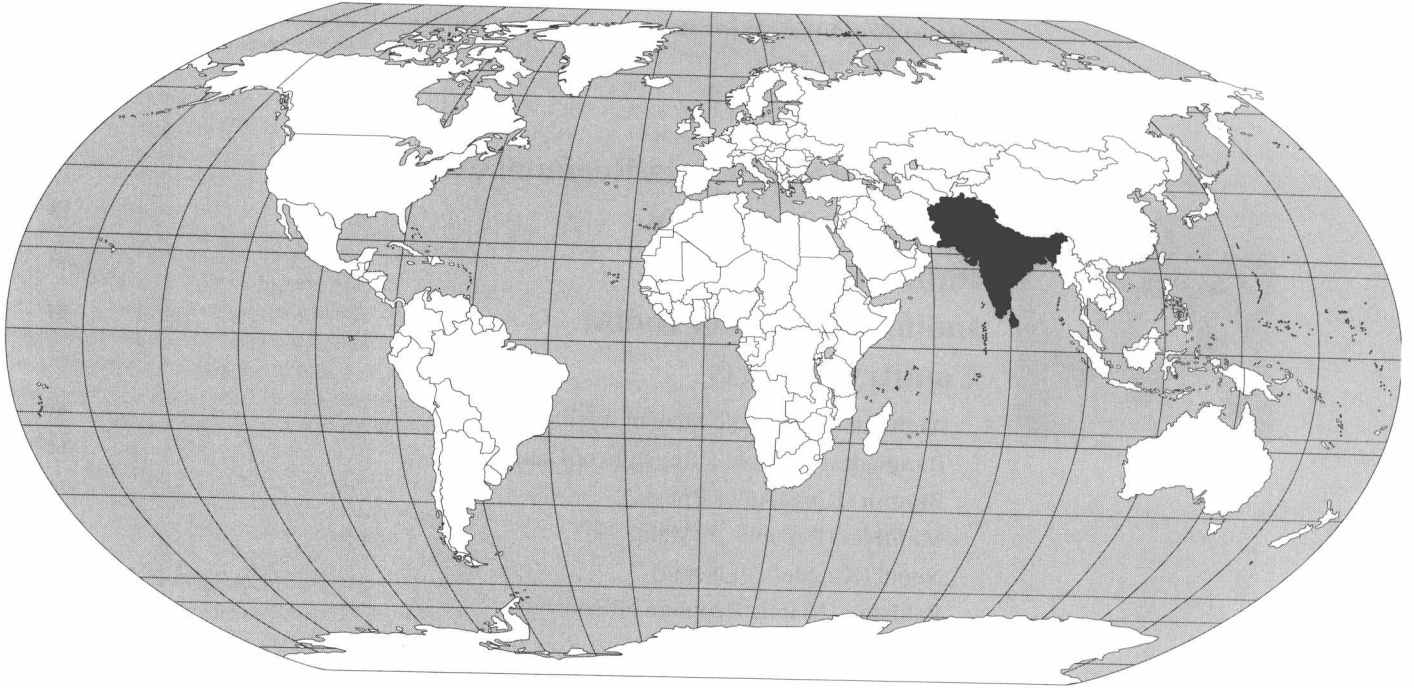
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# India and South Asia

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**Dr. James H. K. Norton**

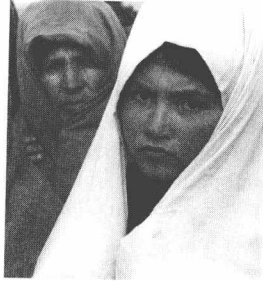
The author/editor of *Global Studies: India and South Asia, Sixth Edition*, received a B.S. degree from Yale University, B.A. and M.A. degrees in Sanskrit from Oxford University, and a Ph.D. in Indian philosophy from the University of Madras in India. He taught for 10 years at the College of Wooster, where he was associate professor of religion and chairman of the Department of Indian Studies. While at Wooster, Dr. Norton initiated a junior-year study program for college students in Madurai University, India, now part of the University of Wisconsin College Year in India program. He has also taught at Madurai University, Boston University, and Oberlin College. He is currently farming in Massachusetts, conducting continuing-education courses, and has served for many years on school boards and school advisory councils on Martha's Vineyard. Dr. Norton has spent five years in India, first as a Ford Foundation scholar while doing graduate work at the University of Madras. He has returned as a teacher and as a senior research fellow of the American Institute of Indian Studies. He is a member of the Association for Asian Studies. His articles on Indian philosophy, on comparisons of Eastern and Western thought, and on Martha's Vineyard local history appear in a number of books and journals.

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# Using Global Studies: India and South Asia

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## THE GLOBAL STUDIES SERIES

The Global Studies series was created to help readers acquire a basic knowledge and understanding of the regions and countries in the world. Each regional volume provides a foundation of information—geographic, cultural, economic, political, historical, artistic, and religious—that will allow readers to better assess the current and future problems within these countries and regions and to comprehend how events there might affect their own well-being. In short, these volumes present background information necessary to respond to the realities of our global age.

Each of the volumes in the Global Studies series is crafted under the careful direction of an author/editor—an expert in the area under study. The author/editors teach and conduct research and have traveled extensively through the regions about which they are writing.

In this *India and South Asia* edition, the author/editor has written introductory essays on the South Asia region and country reports for each of the countries included.

## MAJOR FEATURES OF THE GLOBAL STUDIES SERIES

The Global Studies volumes are organized to provide concise information on the regions and countries within those areas under study. The major sections and features of the books are described here.

### Regional Essays

For *Global Studies: India and South Asia*, the author/editor has written an essay, “Images of South Asia,” focusing on the religious, cultural, sociopolitical, and economic differences and similarities of the countries and peoples in the region. A detailed map accompanies the essay.

### Country Reports

Concise reports are written for each of the countries within the region under study. These reports are the heart of each Global Studies volume. *Global Studies: India and South Asia, Sixth Edition*, contains eight country reports, including India.

The country reports are composed of five standard elements. Each report contains a detailed map visually positioning the country among its neighboring states; a summary of statistical information; a current essay providing important historical, geographical, political, cultural, and economic information; a historical timeline, offering a convenient visual survey of a few key historical events; and four “graphic indicators,” with summary statements about the country in terms of development, freedom, health/welfare, and achievements.

#### *A Note on the Statistical Reports*

The statistical information provided for each country has been drawn from a wide range of sources. (The most frequently referenced are listed on page 2.) Every effort has been made to provide the most current and accurate information available. However, occasionally the information cited by these sources differs to some extent; and, all too often, the most current infor-

mation available for some countries is dated. Aside from these difficulties, the statistical summary of each country is generally quite complete and up to date. Care should be taken, however, in using these statistics (or, for that matter, any published statistics) in making hard comparisons among countries. We have also provided comparable statistics for the United States and Canada, which can be found on pages 8 and 9.

### World Press Articles

Within each Global Studies volume is reprinted a number of articles carefully selected by our editorial staff and the author/editor from a broad range of international periodicals and newspapers. The articles have been chosen for currency, interest, and their differing perspectives. There are 35 articles in *Global Studies: India and South Asia, Sixth Edition*.

The articles section is preceded by an annotated table of contents. This resource offers a brief summary of each article.

### Web Sites

An extensive annotated list of selected World Wide Web sites can be found on the facing page in this edition of *Global Studies: India and South Asia*. In addition, the URL addresses for country-specific Web sites are provided on the statistics page of most countries. All of the Web site addresses were correct and operational at press time. Instructors and students alike are urged to refer to those sites often to enhance their understanding of the region and to keep up with current events.

### Glossary, Bibliography, Index

At the back of each Global Studies volume, readers will find a glossary of terms and abbreviations, which provides a quick reference to the specialized vocabulary of the area under study and to the standard abbreviations used throughout the volume. Following the glossary is a bibliography, which lists general works, national histories, and current-events publications and periodicals that provide regular coverage on India and South Asia. The index at the end of the volume provides reference to the contents of the volume. Readers seeking specific information and citations should consult this standard index.

### Currency and Usefulness

*Global Studies: India and South Asia*, like the other Global Studies volumes, is intended to provide the most current and useful information available necessary to understand the events that are shaping the cultures of the region today.

This volume is revised on a regular basis. The statistics are updated, regional essays and country reports revised, and world press articles replaced. In order to accomplish this task, we turn to our author/editor, our advisory boards, and—hopefully—to you, the users of this volume. Your comments are more than welcome. If you have an idea that you think will make the next edition more useful, an article or bit of information that will make it more current, or a general comment on its organization, content, or features that you would like to share with us, please send it in for serious consideration.

# Selected World Wide Web Sites for India and South Asia

(Some Web sites continually change their structure and content, so the information listed here may not always be available. Check our Web site at: <http://www.dushkin.com/online/> —Ed.)

## GENERAL SITES

### CNN Online Page

<http://www.cnn.com>

This is a U.S. 24-hour video news channel. News, updated every few hours, includes text, pictures, and film. Good external links.

### C-SPAN ONLINE

<http://www.c-span.org>

See especially C-SPAN International on the Web for International Programming Highlights and archived C-Span programs.

### International Network Information Center at University of Texas

<http://inic.utexas.edu>

This is a gateway that has pointers to international sites, including South Asia.

### Penn Library: Resources by Subject

<http://www.library.upenn.edu/resources/subject/subject.html>

Rich in links to information about Asian studies, this vast site includes population and demography data.

### Political Science RESOURCES

<http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk>

On this Web site, find a dynamic gateway to sources available via European addresses. A list of country names is available.

### ReliefWeb

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs clearinghouse for international humanitarian emergencies.

### Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG)

<http://sosig.esrc.bris.ac.uk>

The project of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is located here. It catalogs 22 subjects and lists developing countries' URL addresses.

### Special Issues

<http://specialissues.com/hml>

This unusual site is the repository of transcripts of every kind, compiled by Gary Price, from radio and television, of speeches by world-government leaders, and the proceedings of groups like the United Nations, NATO, and the World Bank.

### United Nations System

<http://www.unsystem.org>

The UN's system of organizations presents this official—Web site. An alphabetical list is available that offers: UNICC—Food and Agriculture Organization.

### UN Development Programme (UNDP)

<http://www.undp.org>

Publications and current information on world poverty, Mission Statement, UN Development Fund for Women, and more can be found here. Be sure to see Poverty Clock.

### U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

<http://www.info.usaid.gov>

The U.S. policy toward assistance to Asian countries is available at this site.

### U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Home Page

<http://www.cia.gov>

This site includes publications of the CIA, such as the World Factbook, Factbook on Intelligence, Handbook of International Economic Statistics, and CIA Maps.

### U.S. Department of State Home Page

<http://www.state.gov/index.html>

Organized alphabetically, this Web site presents: Country Reports, Human Rights, International Organizations, etc.

### World Bank Group

<http://www.worldbank.org>

News (i.e., press releases, summary of new projects, speeches), publications, topics in development, countries and regions are available here. Links to other financial organizations are possible.

### World Health Organization (WHO)

<http://www.who.ch>

Maintained by WHO's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, this comprehensive site includes a search engine.

### World Trade Organization (WTO)

<http://www.wto.org>

Topics include a foundation of world trade systems, data on textiles, intellectual property rights, legal frameworks, trade and environmental policies, recent agreements, and others data.

## GENERAL INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA SITES

### Asia Web Watch

<http://www.ciolek.com/Asia-Web-Watch/main-page.html>

Here is a register of statistical data that can be accessed alphabetically. Data includes Asian Online Materials Statistics and Appendices about Asian cyberspace.

### Asian Arts

<http://asianart.com>

This online journal for the study and exhibition of the arts of Asia includes exhibitions, articles, and galleries.

### Asian Studies WWW Virtual Library

<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVL-AsianStudies.html>

Australia National University maintains these sites, which link to many other Web sources, available at each country's location.

### Asia-Yahoo

<http://www.yahoo.com/Regional/Regions/Asia/>

Access a specialized Yahoo search site that permits keyword searches on Asian events, countries, and topics from here.

### History of the Indian Sub-Continent

<http://www.stockton.edu/~gilmorew/consorti/1aindia.htm>

As part of Stockton's World Wide Web Global History Research Institute, the history of the Indian subcontinent has been arranged chronologically at this site. This excellent resource contains maps, pictures, short writings, and scholarly writings.

### South Asia Resources

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/SouthAsia/>

From this University of Berkeley Library site there is quick access to online resources in Asian studies as well as to South Asian specialists and other special features.

See individual country report pages for additional Web sites.



# The United States (United States of America)

## GEOGRAPHY

*Area in Square Miles (Kilometers):*

3,717,792 (9,629,091) (about 1/2 the size of Russia)

*Capital (Population):* Washington, DC (3,997,000)

*Environmental Concerns:* air and water pollution; limited freshwater resources, desertification; loss of habitat; waste disposal; acid rain

*Geographical Features:* vast central plain, mountains in the west, hills and low mountains in the east; rugged mountains and broad river valleys in Alaska; volcanic topography in Hawaii

*Climate:* mostly temperate, but ranging from tropical to arctic

## PEOPLE

### Population

*Total:* 280,563,000

*Annual Growth Rate:* 0.89%

*Rural/Urban Population Ratio:* 24/76

*Major Languages:* predominantly English; a sizable Spanish-speaking minority; many others

*Ethnic Makeup:* 77% white; 13% black; 4% Asian; 6% Amerindian and others

*Religions:* 56% Protestant; 28% Roman Catholic; 2% Jewish; 4% others; 10% none or unaffiliated

## Health

*Life Expectancy at Birth:* 74 years (male); 80 years (female)

*Infant Mortality:* 6.69/1,000 live births

*Physicians Available:* 1/365 people

*HIV/AIDS Rate in Adults:* 0.61%

## Education

*Adult Literacy Rate:* 97% (official)

*Compulsory (Ages):* 7–16; free

## COMMUNICATION

*Telephones:* 194,000,000 main lines

*Daily Newspaper Circulation:* 238/1,000 people

*Televisions:* 776/1,000 people

*Internet Users:* 165,750,000 (2002)

## TRANSPORTATION

*Highways in Miles (Kilometers):* 3,906,960 (6,261,154)

*Railroads in Miles (Kilometers):* 149,161 (240,000)

*Usable Airfields:* 14,695

*Motor Vehicles in Use:* 206,000,000

## GOVERNMENT

*Type:* federal republic

*Independence Date:* July 4, 1776

*Head of State/Government:* President

George W. Bush is both head of state and head of government

*Political Parties:* Democratic Party; Republican Party; others of relatively minor political significance

*Suffrage:* universal at 18

## MILITARY

*Military Expenditures (% of GDP):* 3.2%

*Current Disputes:* various boundary and territorial disputes; "war on terrorism"

## ECONOMY

*Per Capita Income/GDP:* \$36,300/\$10.082 trillion

*GDP Growth Rate:* 0%

*Inflation Rate:* 3%

*Unemployment Rate:* 5.8%

*Population Below Poverty Line:* 13%

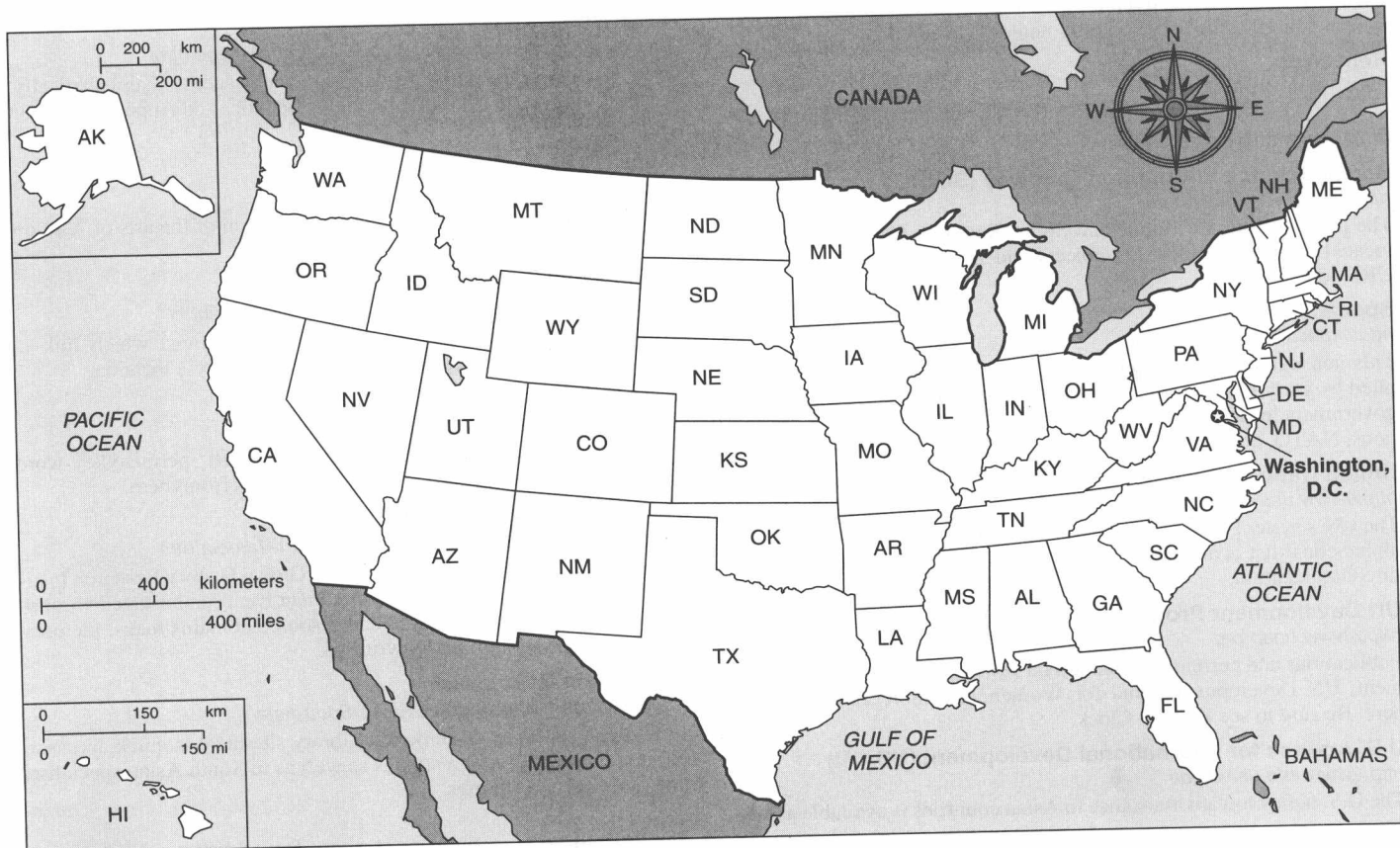
*Natural Resources:* many minerals and metals; petroleum; natural gas; timber; arable land

*Agriculture:* food grains; feed crops; fruits and vegetables; oil-bearing crops; livestock; dairy products

*Industry:* diversified in both capital and consumer-goods industries

*Exports:* \$723 billion (primary partners Canada, Mexico, Japan)

*Imports:* \$1.148 trillion (primary partners Canada, Mexico, Japan)



# Canada

## GEOGRAPHY

Area in Square Miles (Kilometers):

3,850,790 (9,976,140) (slightly larger than the United States)

Capital (Population): Ottawa (1,094,000)

Environmental Concerns: air and water pollution; acid rain; industrial damage to agriculture and forest productivity

Geographical Features: permafrost in the north; mountains in the west; central plains; lowlands in the southeast

Climate: varies from temperate to arctic

## PEOPLE

### Population

Total: 31,903,000

Annual Growth Rate: 0.96%

Rural/Urban Population Ratio: 23/77

Major Languages: both English and French are official

Ethnic Makeup: 28% British Isles origin; 23% French origin; 15% other European; 6% others; 2% indigenous; 26% mixed

Religions: 46% Roman Catholic; 36% Protestant; 18% others

### Health

Life Expectancy at Birth: 76 years (male); 83 years (female)

Infant Mortality: 4.95/1,000 live births

Physicians Available: 1/534 people

HIV/AIDS Rate in Adults: 0.3%

### Education

Adult Literacy Rate: 97%

Compulsory (Ages): primary school

### COMMUNICATION

Telephones: 20,803,000 main lines

Daily Newspaper Circulation: 215/1,000 people

Televisions: 647/1,000 people

Internet Users: 16,840,000 (2002)

### TRANSPORTATION

Highways in Miles (Kilometers): 559,240 (902,000)

Railroads in Miles (Kilometers): 22,320 (36,000)

Usable Airfields: 1,419

Motor Vehicles in Use: 16,800,000

### GOVERNMENT

Type: confederation with parliamentary democracy

Independence Date: July 1, 1867

Head of State/Government: Queen Elizabeth II; Prime Minister Jean Chrétien

Political Parties: Progressive Conservative Party; Liberal Party; New Democratic Party; Bloc Québécois; Canadian Alliance

Suffrage: universal at 18

### MILITARY

Military Expenditures (% of GDP): 1.1%

Current Disputes: maritime boundary disputes with the United States

### ECONOMY

Currency (\$U.S. equivalent): 1.46 Canadian dollars = \$1

Per Capita Income/GDP: \$27,700/\$875 billion

GDP Growth Rate: 2%

Inflation Rate: 3%

Unemployment Rate: 7%

Labor Force by Occupation: 74% services; 15% manufacturing; 6% agriculture and others

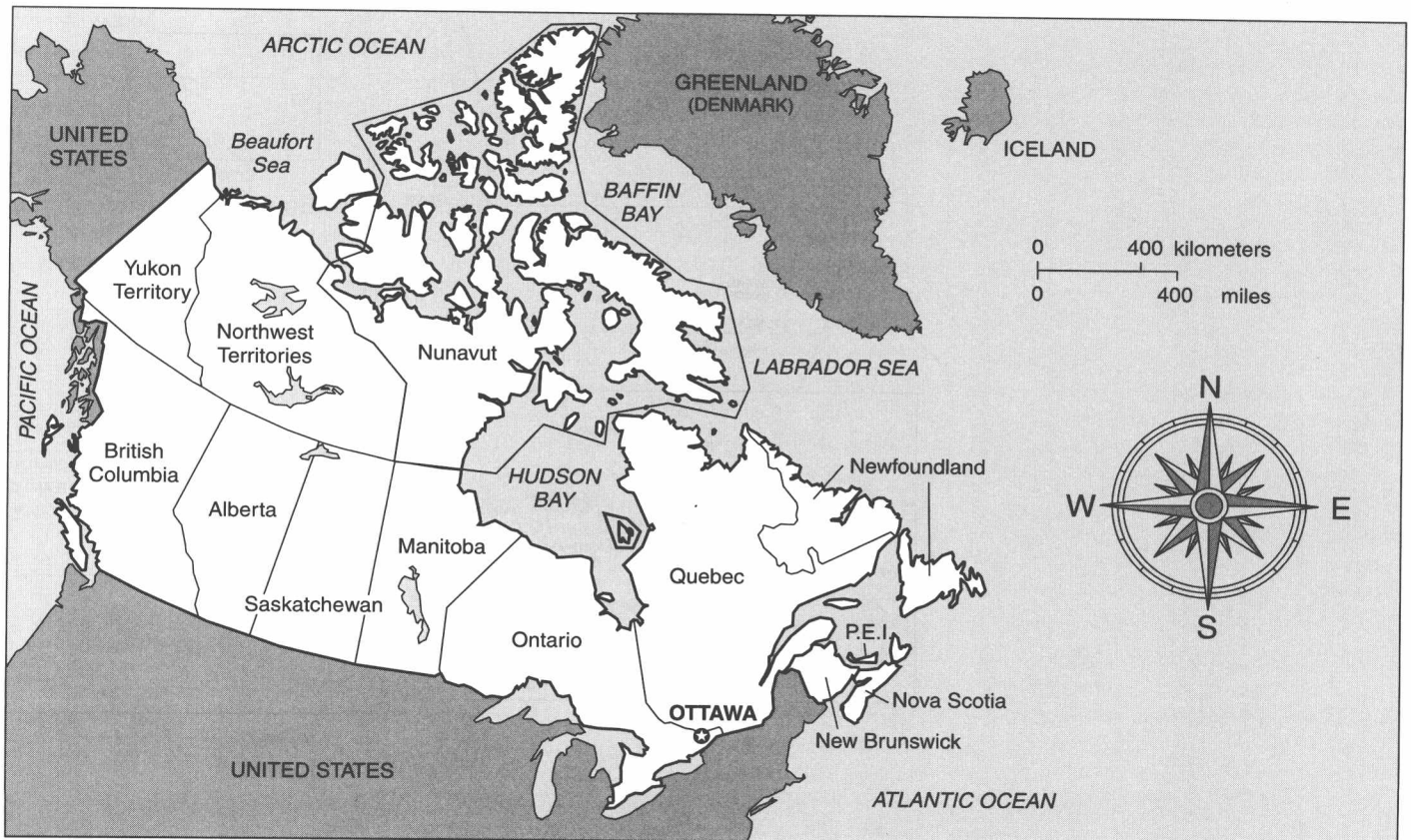
Natural Resources: petroleum; natural gas; fish; minerals; cement; forestry products; wildlife; hydropower

Agriculture: grains; livestock; dairy products; potatoes; hogs; poultry and eggs; tobacco; fruits and vegetables

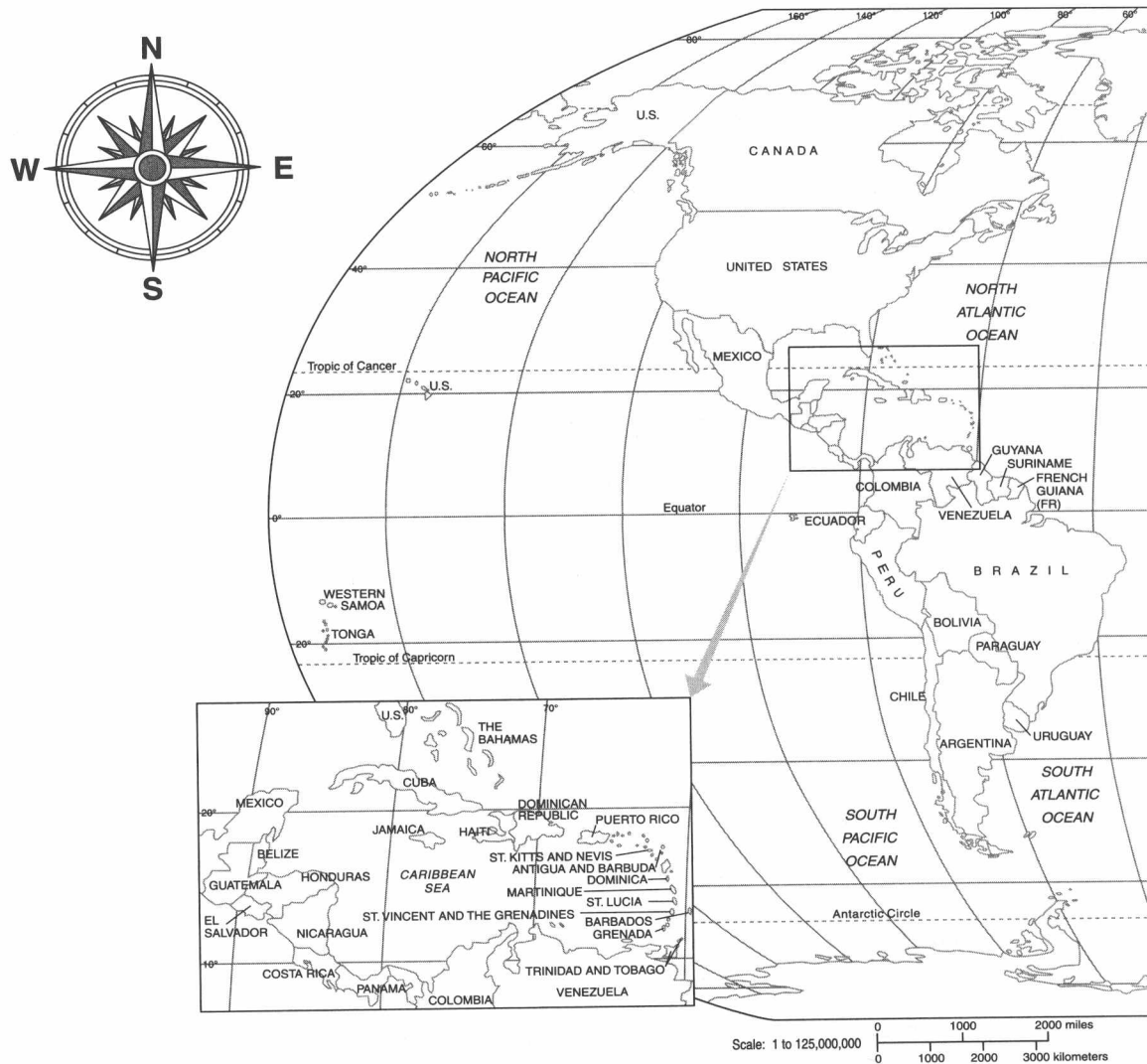
Industry: oil production and refining; natural-gas development; fish products; wood and paper products; chemicals; transportation equipment

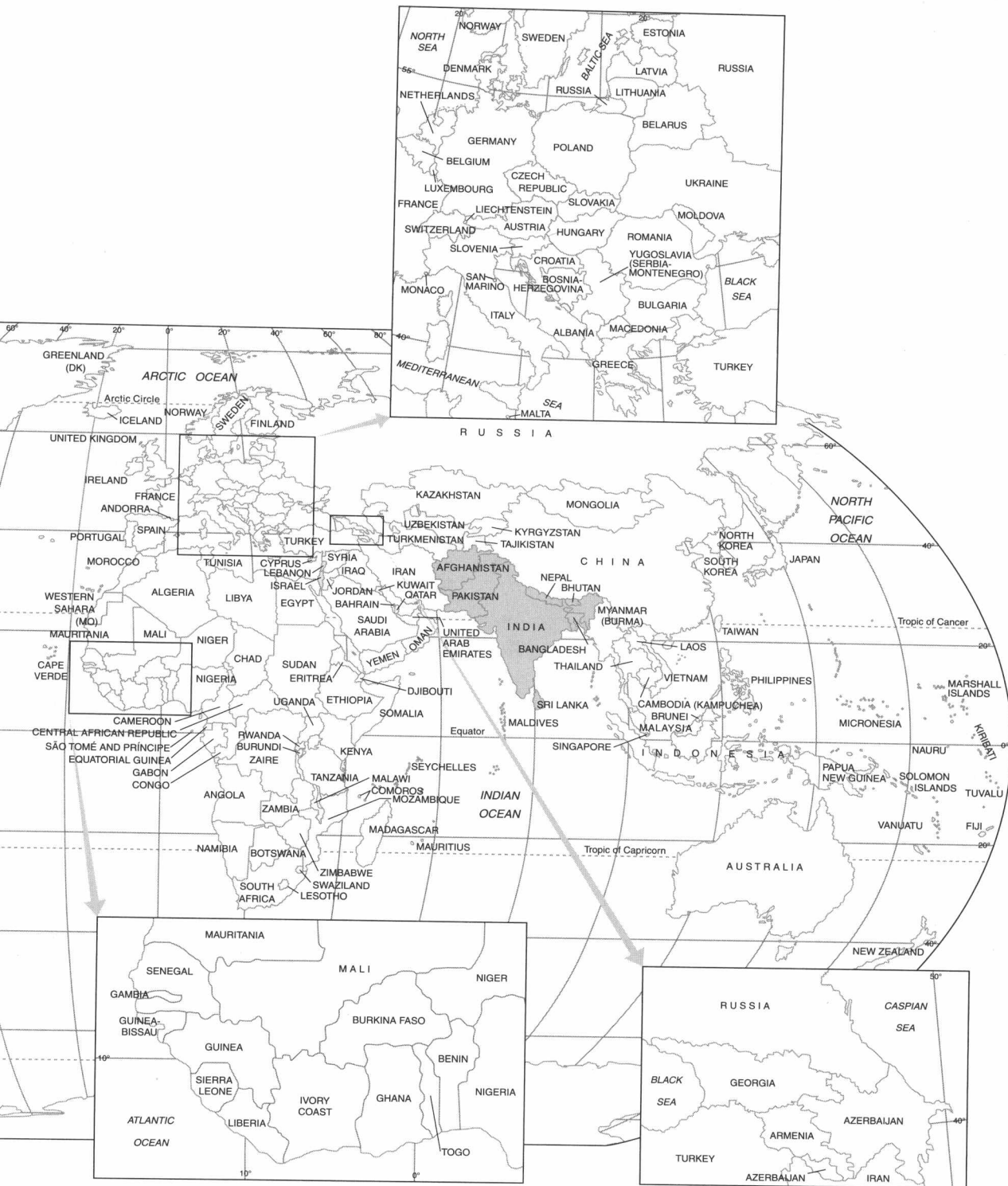
Exports: \$273.8 billion (primary partners United States, Japan, United Kingdom)

Imports: \$238.3 billion (primary partners United States, European Union, Japan)

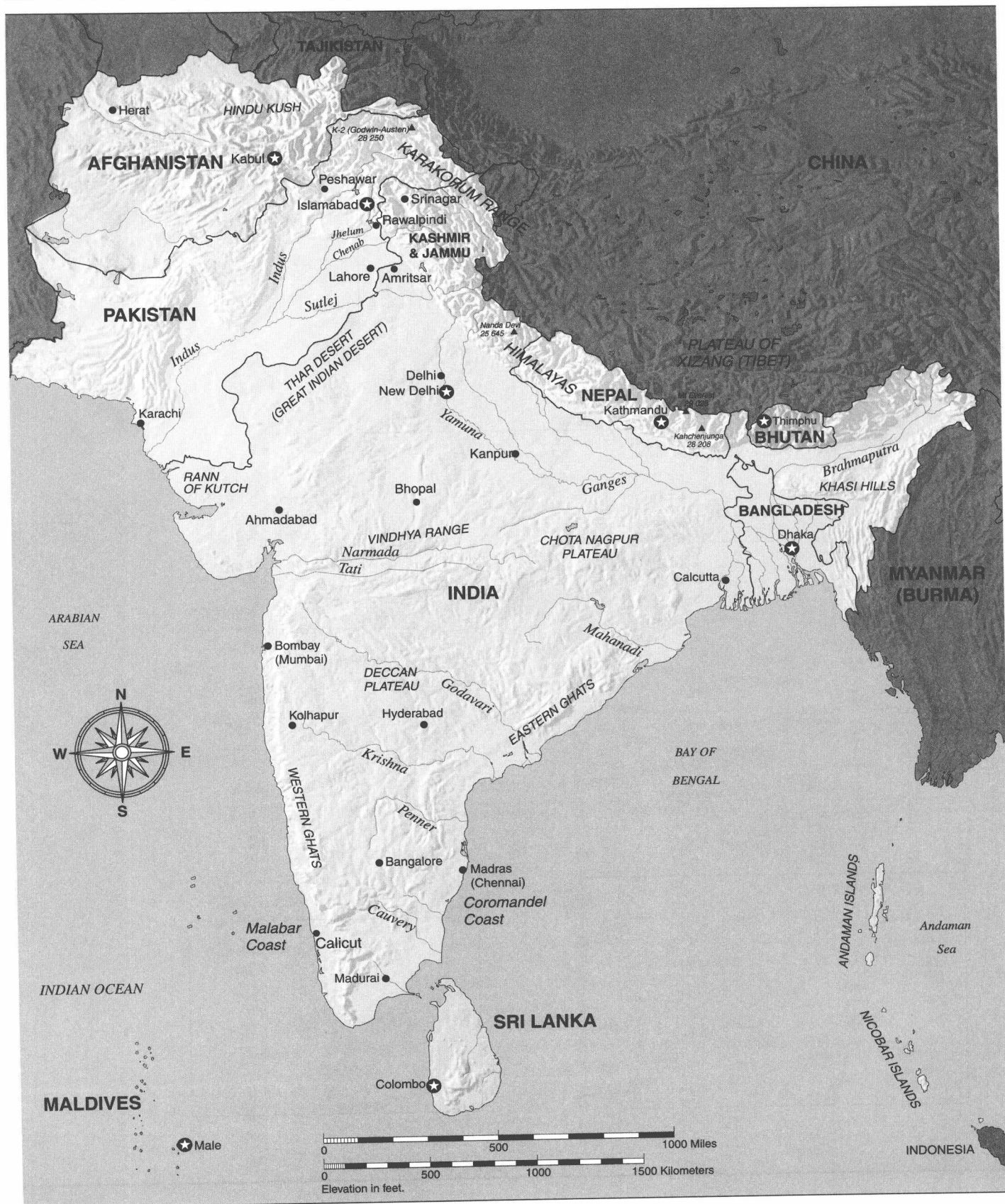


This map is provided to give you a graphic picture of where the countries of the world are located, the relationship they have with their region and neighbors, and their positions relative to major trade and power blocs. We have focused on certain areas to illustrate these crowded regions more clearly. The India and South Asia region is shaded for emphasis.





# India and South Asia



# Images of South Asia

The global “war on terrorism,” following the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, put South Asia front-and-center onto the television screens of the Western world. Names of places like Kandahar, Tora Bora, and Kashmir became landmarks in a previously unfamiliar territory. General Pervez Musharraf, who only in 1999 became the president of Pakistan, as the result of a bloodless military coup, now appeared on the world stage as a designated leader in the international fight against terror. As a result of the foiled attempt by a terrorist group to blow up the Parliament Building in New Delhi, India, on December 13, 2001, Indian and Pakistani soldiers were deployed along the “Line of Control” in the contested province of Kashmir, in what Western interpreters took to be the verge of a nuclear war. And the brutal religious movement in Afghanistan called the Taliban, and its leader, Mullah Omar, took on a quasi-demonic significance as accomplices in terror for harboring Osama bin Laden and other leaders of al-Qaeda, the group blamed for 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. All of these places and events in South Asia caught the attention of the world when American and other coalition forces began to bomb suspected centers and hideouts of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces across Afghanistan.

The war on terrorism identified a distinct region of the world about a quarter the size of North America, set apart from the rest of Asia by high mountains and ocean waters, and inhabited by more than 1.3 billion people, or one fifth of the world’s total population. The world discovered there peoples with a unique and ancient history that has shaped the culture, languages, social patterns, institutions, and religious traditions in a wide variety of ways that are quite different from those found anywhere else. Even some attitudes and assumptions about such elemental “realities” as truth, life, time, and life-after-death are different from those held in other parts of the world.

The uniqueness of South Asia is evident in some important contributions that it has made to the world. The number zero, the most symbolic and elusive of all numbers, was discovered in South Asia and added to the traditional ways of counting in the West only after Arab traders brought it in a system known, for that reason, as Arabic numbers. Linguistics, the study of the structure of language, also had its origin in South Asia. Yoga, a spiritual discipline increasingly pursued in the West, has been practiced in South Asia since ancient times. The Buddhist religion, which has many followers throughout Asia and increasingly in the rest of the world, began there in the sixth century B.C. And *satyagraha* (nonviolent resistance) was developed by India’s Mahatma Gandhi in the twentieth century as an alternative to power politics. These contributions reveal the extent and variety of creative ideas that evolved in the unique cultural environment of South Asia for the benefit of all humankind.

There are also some common challenges that the peoples of this region share with the rest of the world. International terrorism is surely one. Population density and growth, environmental degradation, national identity, economic development, social equality and women’s rights, child labor, illiteracy, pov-

erty, and disease (among which is an alarming increase in the cases of HIV/AIDS) are also issues that threaten the well-being of everyone in the world. The way South Asian nations respond to these challenges will reflect the uniqueness of this region. Their success in meeting them is important not only for their own people, but also toward assuring a future for us all.

## OUT OF MANY VIEWS, A PORTRAIT

This essay presents five images of South Asia. These images are not definitive. Rather, they intend to point to a comprehensive picture of what we can learn from this immensely varied part of the world.

The first image is that South Asia is a separate geographical and cultural region. Because of its geographic isolation as a place, a culture has evolved over many centuries that unyieldingly retains many qualities and vestiges of its past. So dominant is this past that in some places it is as though one enters a world in which no time has elapsed. And yet it has also been so continuously interactive through these centuries with other parts of the world that it remains vibrant, adaptive, and creative. Side by side, the most ancient of traditions and the latest in computer technology intermingle as part of daily life.

In this first image, we briefly describe four distinct geographical regions of the subcontinent. They reveal a wide variety of natural environments in which the peoples of South Asia live. Then we look at three quite different interactions that have occurred here with distinct cultures from other parts of the world over a long span of time. The earliest is the migration of the Vedic-speaking Aryan peoples into the subcontinent, which took place around 1500 B.C., more than 3 1/2 millennia ago. The Moghul invasion started 3,000 years later, in the sixteenth century A.D., but built upon earlier advances of the Islamic religion into the subcontinent. And the rule of the British Raj, which began officially only in 1858, built upon economic interests that began with the forming of the East India Company in London, England in the early seventeenth century. Each of these interactions was very different in character and impact. But their consequences are still vitally present in the complex mix of traditions and expectations which characterize the peoples of the subcontinent as living in a unique and distinct part of the world today.

The second image is that South Asia is an incredibly diverse as well as crowded multicultural environment. The large population is divided among eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. As islands, the borders of Maldives and Sri Lanka are defined by geography. Yet the borders of Sri Lanka and all the other countries of the region, except Bangladesh, do not enclose peoples of common language and ethnic origin. These six countries are all multicultural, with a wide diversity of social groups who speak different languages and follow distinct customs and separate religious traditions.



(UN Photo 153428/John Isaac)

The sheer multitude of people who live in South Asia is mind-boggling: More than 1.3 billion crowd the subcontinent, and despite some successes in family planning, that number is climbing rapidly.

Their boundaries also separate peoples of shared ethnicity, language, and religion into different nationalities. The Pushtuns (Pathans), for example, were divided by the border established between British India and Afghanistan in 1907. In 1979, at the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, about 6 million Pushtuns—more than a third of the total population of that country—lived on the Afghan side. Another 10 million lived on the other side of the border, constituting the dominant population in what was by then the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. The separation of these Pashto-speaking peoples as dominant minorities between two nationalities remains a significant factor in South Asian politics to this day.

India, by far the largest country in South Asia, with more than 75 percent of the total population and occupying 64 percent of the land of the subcontinent, is socially and linguistically the most diverse. Seventeen distinct, indigenous languages, each with innumerable dialects, are recognized in the Constitution of India. Each is dominant in a different part of

the country, and none is spoken by a majority of the population. Only English, although foreign in origin and spoken as the primary or native language by less than 6 percent of the people, serves as the “link language” among all the many linguistic regions of the country.

People living in the same place who all speak the same language are also divided into extended kinship groups called caste (*jati*) communities. These communities sustain accepted norms of behavior, dress, and diet for all of their members. They are also endogamous, which means that families are expected to find marriage partners for their children among other families within the group. Many are identified by a traditional occupation, from which each derives its name, such as *dhobi* (washerwoman community), *gujar* (goat herder community), and *jat* (farmer community). There are hundreds of thousands of such kinship groups throughout India. In a normal village setting, individuals will interact on a daily basis with others from about 20 different jatis. The locally accepted position of their jatis in a social hierarchy, generally termed the *caste system*, will determine the expected social norms of their daily interactions. One’s position in the immediate family is also highly proscribed by traditional expectations, maintained in most instances by the patriarchal structure of the family.

Another significant division in all of the countries of the subcontinent is between the urban and the rural populations. Rural dwellers outnumber city dwellers three to one. Those who live in villages also contrast vividly in maintaining more traditional customs and lifestyles than those in the cities. Another striking contrast, in both the cities and villages, is between those who are wealthy and the multitude of the very poor.

That such a diverse population lives in such crowded circumstances, with everyone drawing upon limited resources, is a great achievement—and a constant challenge. There is no shortage of causes for altercation among socially distinct groups. Extensive outbursts, rampaging, and rioting do occur among competitive factions and differing religious communities, as well as outright warfare among militant nationalist organizations and between nation-states. Yet for most of the subcontinent, there is a heritage of accommodation and an expectation of tolerance among peoples of differing customs, languages, and religious faiths. To understand something of the complex patterns of social interaction that exist in South Asia, to see how it does and doesn’t work, should be helpful to other peoples as they become more multiculturally conscious.

The next two images amplify the first two images of South Asia as a distinct, diverse, and crowded cultural region of the world. The third image looks toward the past, at the classical heritage of the peoples of the subcontinent, known as the “Great Tradition,” to see how it underlies and sustains the complex and persistent social diversity in South Asia. The fourth image looks at the impact of democracy in the subcontinent today, especially among peoples whose primary sense of identity is ethnic, religious, and linguistic, as sustained by one’s *jati* community—rather than political, as a nation.

The third image, of the Great Tradition of South Asia, has its earliest discernible roots in two vastly different sources. One is the Harappan city culture. Archeological remains of this ancient urban culture reveal organizational and commercial skills developed in these Indus River Valley cities more than 4,500

years ago. Another source is the Vedic tradition, recorded in a sacred literature that contains the religious musings of a robust, cow-herding people, called Aryans. They drove their horse-drawn war chariots into the subcontinent from Central Asia 3,500 years ago. Over the course of many centuries, these two heritages were coalesced, elaborated, appended, and refined into classical forms that became normative for the way civilized people in that region of the world should perceive and participate in life. These forms provided the structure for immense intellectual and artistic creativity, which produced many outstanding works of thought and art.

Because of the skill, discipline, and depth of insight achieved by South Asia's classical thinkers and artisans, their accumulated works are intellectually challenging and inspiring. The tradition that they created reveals an enduring perspective on our world that can be broadening and self-affirming for us, as well as giving some definition to the uniqueness of South Asian cultures. An awareness of this Great Tradition also provides a context for understanding the introduction of democracy as a political force among the nations of South Asia. In addition, it offers alternative paths to realize the goals of democracy in a world torn by ethnic violence and warfare.

The fourth image of South Asia looks at the introduction of democracy into the subcontinent as a primary instrument of political modernization. Democracy is having a profound impact not only on the forms and goals of governments in the countries of South Asia; it is also changing the bases of people's interaction with one another. Democratically elected representative government is a modern Western institution, introduced by the British colonial government during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its introduction has brought about a number of far-reaching issues. All of the countries have had to deal with challenges of national identity, of the relation of religion to nationalism, of refugees, and of political stability. These issues have produced unanticipated, sometimes traumatic, consequences for many millions of people. Yet today, more people live under democratic rule in South Asia than in any other part of the world. There is much that we can learn about democracy by examining the various ways that it has come to function in the South Asian cultural setting.

Finally, in a fifth image, we focus attention on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, called the *Mahatma*, the "Great-Souled One." During the early 1900s, Gandhi evolved an effective process of nonviolent political resistance. He also developed a style of leadership that drew upon a unique combination of the classical norms and modern aspirations described in the previous two images of South Asia. He articulated, in enviable simplicity, the profound perspective of the classical tradition in committing himself not just to the removal of colonial domination, to political independence, but to true freedom for an oppressed people. He thus empowered those who today are citizens of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal to participate in the destiny of new, democratically ruled nations in the modern world.

To understand Gandhi and his leadership role is to realize how much he embodied what is distinct about the peoples of South Asia. Yet it is in his uniqueness as an individual among a specific people that he speaks to us all. No one else in the twentieth century had so wide and positive an impact on the political

awareness and empowerment of oppressed peoples all over the world.

## IMAGE 1: SOUTH ASIA, A DISTINCT LAND AND AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION

A. K. Ramanujan used to tell the story of a Mongolian conqueror who had a certain species of nightingale brought to him from Kashmir because he had heard that this bird sang the most beautiful song in the world. But when the bird arrived, it did not sing. It was explained to the enraged conqueror that the bird sang only when perched on the branch of a chinar tree, and that the chinar tree grows only on the hillsides of Kashmir. Ramanujan concluded this story of what the conqueror needed to do to get his captured nightingale to sing with these words:

We know the story of that Mongolian conqueror, taker of a bird in its nest, and of the nest in its tree, who brought back with the bird and nest and song the whole natal tree itself, torn from its place with its multitude of roots, its ball of earth and its border of soil, a remnant of home territory evoking a field, a province, a country, and an empire....

—St.-John Perse, *Birds*  
(cited in A. K. Ramanujan,  
*Poems of Love and War*)

### A DISTINCT LAND

The land on which the people of South Asia live is clearly set apart from the rest of Asia as a geographical area. Geologically speaking, it is a recent addition to the continent. About 100 million years ago, it broke away from the east coast of Africa and drifted slowly on a separate geological plate east and north, until it collided, about 28 million years ago, with the southern edge of the continental landmass of Asia. The immense power of this impact scrunched up the south coast of Asia. It pushed the Tibetan Plateau more than three miles into the air and created a high ridge of snow-clad peaks, which today mark the line of impact. This mountain range, the Himalayas, is the highest in the world, and it is still rising (at a rate of about 10 inches per century) as a result of the massive collision that occurred so many millions of years ago.

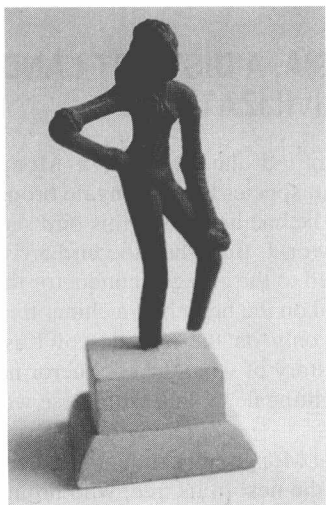
The perimeters of the subcontinent are still clearly delineated by nature—on the north, by the high, forbidding Himalayas; on the south, by the vast expanse of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean. The high mountain peaks and vast ocean waters dominate the landscape. They also produce the annual monsoons, seasonal torrents of rain upon which the livelihood of the people of South Asia depends.

Within these natural borders is a wide range of geographical conditions, of topography and climate, that divide into four distinct regions. First, farthest to the north, are the frigid, arctic heights of the south face of the Himalayan Mountains. All of Afghanistan and Bhutan, most of Nepal, and small portions of India and Pakistan fall within this region.

These mountainous Himalayan lands fall precipitously and dramatically toward the south into the second region—the wide, alluvial river valleys that stretch across the north-central



## AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION



## What He Said

As a little white snake  
with lovely stripes on its young body  
troubles the jungle elephant  
this slip of a girl  
her teeth like sprouts of new rice  
her wrists stacked with bangles  
troubles me.

—*Catti Natana r Kur 119*  
(translated by A. K. Ramanujan)

This small statue of a girl was cast in bronze more than 4,000 years ago in Mohenjo Daro, the ancient city of the Harappan civilization in the Indus River Valley. Lost in the sands that buried that city so long ago, her image was captured 2,000 years later by a south Indian poet at the other end of the subcontinent, some 2,000 miles away, in this love poem found in the classical Tamil Sangam anthology called the *Kuruntokai*. Recovered in the twentieth century from the excavations of the ancient city and in the translations of the classical Sangam poetry, we, too, are tantalized by this tiny yet enduring image from South Asia.

portion of the subcontinent. Three river systems—the Indus, the Jumna-Ganges, and the Brahmaputra—all begin within 100 miles of one another in the Himalayas, but flow in three different directions through the mountains and down into the expanse of the north-central plains. The Indus flows to the west, through Pakistan to the Arabian Sea. The Jumna-Ganges Rivers flow to the south, and then join to flow east across the great northern plain, to where they merge with the Brahmaputra River. The Brahmaputra flows to the east from its Himalayan source, and then south into Bangladesh. Both river systems then flow together, through many tributaries, into the Bay of Bengal.

All three river systems provide the north-central plains with a steady, if uneven, flow of melting snow. Because of this flow through the temperate northern plains, this region is the most widely irrigated and has the most productive agricultural lands of the subcontinent.

To the south of the northern plains region, entirely in India, are the highlands of the peninsula, which project out into the Indian Ocean. The highlands rise to a wide plateau, called the Deccan, which is bordered to the east and west by smaller, but older, mountains than the Himalayas. The central portion of Sri Lanka also rises to highlands, which, together with the Deccan, form the third geographically distinct region of the subcontinent. Because these highlands are not high enough to be snow-covered, farmers in this region are entirely dependent upon the seasonal monsoonal rains for sufficient water to cultivate the land.

From these highlands, the land slopes down into the fourth region, the coastal plains and tropical beaches of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. Most of South Asia's largest cities, which developed as trading posts during the seventeenth century and are now great centers of commerce, fall within this coastal region.

These four distinct regions, which also include desert and rain forest, present as wide a range of topography and climate as exists anywhere in the world. Together, appended to the southern side of Asia, they form a varied and isolated geographical space.

## AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION

## Maritime Commerce

The earliest evidence of a distinctive South Asian culture is found in the archeological sites of the world's earliest known urban civilization. This Harappan city culture flourished in the Indus River Valley, in the northwestern portion of the subcontinent, from 3000 to 1500 B.C. Excavations of these ancient Harappan sites have revealed that the early city dwellers produced enough surplus, primarily in cotton and grains, to carry on trade well beyond their own region. Their commercial activity extended into the developing civilizations in the Fertile Crescent, Africa, and Europe to the west, and in Southeast Asia and China to the east.

This trading shows that from earliest times, the ocean waters into which the subcontinent projects have been not so much a barrier as a vital concourse. Maritime commerce has continued to be a major activity along the shores of the subcontinent, from the days of Harappan mercantile enterprise, through the era of silk trade, to the fiercely competitive activity of European trading companies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, into the present day.

As a result of this crucial location on international trade routes, the peoples of South Asia have interacted with the major currents of human civilization since very ancient times. This interaction brought peacocks out of the subcontinent to embellish the throne of King Solomon in ancient Israel, the number zero to Europe during the Renaissance to change the way mathematical computations were done in the West, and Buddhism to become a major religious faith in East Asia and the rest of the world.

Because of the extent and intensity of this interaction, it is difficult to trace the origin of many of the concepts and practices that came the other way—that entered the subcontinent from other regions and now form a part of South Asian daily life. We do not know, for example, the origin of the Harappan city builders, whose layout of streets and water use reveal a