

Miscellaneous Culture

India is a country with a varied mix of people. India's languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food, and customs differ from place to place within the country. Indian culture is an amalgamation of several cultures, and has been influenced over several millennia of history by other cultures.

Culture

Different regions in India have their own distinct cultures and sub-cultures. Language, religion, food and the arts are just some of the various aspects of Indian culture. The South, North, and Northeast have their own distinct cultures and almost every state has carved out its own cultural niche. The sheer size of the country with its variety of geographical features and climatic conditions have all contributed to what we call "Indian Culture". India is home to some of the most ancient civilizations, and is home to people from most religions.

Whether in the matter of cuisine, where every state, region and district can boast of unique flavours and ingredients or clothing, which is a tribute to the local micro-climate as well as a plethora of weaves, drapes and embellishments, Indian culture as a composite whole has a staggering variety of everything. Festivals in India – aplenty, given the multiplicity of communities – are characterized by colour, gaiety, enthusiasm, prayers and rituals.

Indian Calendars

The Government of India brings out a Calendar of Gazetted Holidays and Restricted Holidays that cater to most of the major and regional festivals celebrated by the various religious and linguistic communities. However, the populace often uses one or more of the multiple traditional calendars and almanacs that have been employed by Indians since the very dawn of civilisation in the subcontinent.

The national calendar based on the Saka Era, with Chaitra as its first month and a normal year of 365 days was adopted from 22 March 1957 along with the Gregorian calendar for the following official purposes:

- Gazette of India.
- News broadcast by All India Radio.
- Calendars issued by the Government of India.
- Government communications addressed to the members of the public.

Dates of the national calendar have a permanent correspondence with dates of the Gregorian calendar, 1 Chaitra falling on 22 March normally and on 21 March in leap year.

The Hindu calendar is a collective term for the various lunisolar calendars traditionally used in India. The most well-known Hindu calendar is the Vikrami calendar used in Northern, Western and Central India. Others include the Bengali calendar (Eastern India) and Tamil

calendar (in the South). These emphasise the lunar cycle, with their new year beginning in spring. In Kerala, the solar cycle is emphasised, and the new year starts in autumn. A Hindu calendar is sometimes referred to as a Panchanga.

Unlike the Gregorian calendar which adds additional days to a lunar month to adjust for the mismatch between twelve lunar cycles (354 lunar days) and the solar year which has 365 days, the Hindu calendar maintains the integrity of the lunar month, but inserts an extra full month by complex rules, every few years, to ensure that the festivals and crop-related rituals fall in the appropriate season.

Buddhist festivals continue to be scheduled according to a lunar system. The Buddhist calendar and the traditional lunisolar calendars of several South East Asian countries like Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Sri Lanka are based on older versions of the Hindu calendar. Jainism also follows the same lunisolar system as the Hindu calendar for festivals, texts and inscriptions.

The Hindu calendar is important to the practice of Hindu astrology and has its own zodiac system. The Indian national calendar or "Saka calendar" was redesigned in an effort that started in 1952 based on the traditional Hindu calendars, and it was adopted on March 22, 1957.

Months of the Year

The lunar calendar has 12 months as follows: Chaitra, Vaishaka, Jyesta, Aashada, Shravana, Bhadrapada, Aswin, Kartika, Margashish, Pushya or Posh, Magha, Phalguna.

The Solar calendar comprises of Mesha, Vrushabha, Mithuna, Karkata, Simha, Kanya, Tula, Vrischika, Dhanusha, Makara, Kumbha and Meena. Chaitra/Mesha usually starts around March end and the rest of the months follow. The zodiac signs are similar in description and cycle to those of the Western Zodiac.

Festivals

India is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, and Indians celebrate a variety of festivals through the year.

The three National Holidays – observed everywhere in India as holidays – are Independence Day (15th August), Republic Day (26th January) and Gandhi Jayanti (2nd October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi).



Colours of India

List of famous festivals of India

Diwali

Diwali or *Deepawali* (meaning "a row of lights") is the festival of lights or *Deepa* and one of the most prominent Hindi festivals of India. The festival is celebrated variously by different communities: in North India to mark the return of Lord Rama, along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, after 14 years of exile and victory over Ravana. In some parts of the East, it is celebrated as Kali Puja (obeisance to the Goddess Kali) whilst in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka, the festival marks the slaying of the demon Narakasura by Krishna, and by others, the marriage of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity with Vishnu. In almost all of its forms, Diwali symbolises the victory of virtue over evil and the bringer of happy tidings, prosperity and success.



On Diwali, people decorate their houses with clay lamps, candles and other fancy lights. A Puja (prayer with offerings) is organised by families; sweets are shared among friends and neighbours; fireworks and crackers are burst across the country. Houses are painted in time for Diwali.

Diwali is a five-day festival in many regions of India, with Diwali night centered on the new moon – the darkest night – at the end of the Hindu lunar month of *Ashwin* and the start of the month of *Kartik*. In the Common Era Calendar, Diwali usually falls towards the end of October, or first half of November each year.

Day 1 is *Dhanteras* or *Dhanatrayodashi*, the thirteenth day of the waning moon, (celebrated mostly in Northern and Western part of India) starts off the five day festival.

Day 2: *Narak Chaturdashi* marks the second day of festivities, and is also called *Choti Diwali*. Puranic texts narrate that the asura (demon) Narakasura was killed on this day by Krishna, Satyabhama and Kali. It is the most important day for Maharashtrians, Goans, Tamils and Kannadigas, symbolised by a pre-dawn ritualistic bath and prayers.

Day 3: The third day or Amavasya (new moon) is the main festive day for communities celebrating the return of Rama. People wear new or fresh clothes as evening approaches. At sunset, *diyas* (earthen oil lamps) are lit, prayers are offered primarily to Goddess Lakshmi, as well as to one or more additional deities depending on the region; often Ganesha, Saraswati and Kubera. Lakshmi symbolises wealth and prosperity, and her blessings are invoked for financial success.

Day 4: The day after Diwali is celebrated as *Padwa*. This day ritually celebrates the love and mutual devotion between married couples.

Day 5: The last day of the festival is called *Bhai dooj* (*dooj* means 2nd day after a new or full moon). It celebrates the bonds between sisters and brothers, in a spirit similar to Raksha Bandhan but with different rituals.

Holi

Holi, also known as the festival of colours, is a spring festival celebrated all across India, particularly in northern, central and western India. It signifies the victory of good over evil, the arrival of spring and corresponding end of winter, and for a festive day of enjoyment with friends and family. It is also celebrated as a thanksgiving for a good harvest.



It lasts for a night and a day, starting on the evening of *Purnima* (Full Moon day) falling in the Hindu month of *Phalguna*, which usually corresponds to the end of February to mid-March in the Western Calendar. The first evening is known as *Holika Dahan* (death of the demoness Holika) or *Chhoti Holi* and the following day as Holi, *Rangwali Holi*, or *Phagwah*.

On Holi, people wear old clothes, traditionally white in colour, and throw coloured powder and coloured water using water-guns known as *pichkari*. After playing Holi, the colour-stained clothes are discarded and fresh ones are worn, symbolising new beginnings, a kind of personal spring cleaning. Holi snacks include *gujiya*, a fried sweetmeat using flour, sugar and coconut shavings and *bharg* *thandai* (almond milk laced with pounded marijuana leaves, one of the rare times that Indian traditions allow the consumption of an intoxicating substance).

Dussehra

Also known as Vijayadashmi, it is celebrated at the end of *Navaratri* (nine nights) every year. In eastern India, it marks the end of the nine-day festival Durga Puja, celebrating Goddess Durga's victory over the demon Mahishasura. In northern and western India, it is celebrated to remember the Lord Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana. Among many Tamil and Telugu speaking communities, it is a festival that honours the Goddess in different forms – Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, across nine days, culminating in Vijayadashmi, which marks new academic and artistic beginnings.



In northern India, Ramlila, a theatrical enactment of the Ramayana, is an intrinsic part of the festival, and is staged over 10 (or more) days. At the end of it, huge effigies of Ravana, his son Meghnad and brother Kumbhakarna are burnt. The last day of *Ramlila* coincides with Dussehra.

Ganesh Chaturthi



This festival is celebrated by devotees of Lord Ganesha. A ten-day festival, it starts on the fourth day of the Hindu month of *Bhadrapada*, which typically falls in the Gregorian months of August or September. Clay idols of Lord Ganesha are installed in homes or public pandals and rituals are performed every day. The festival ends on the tenth day, when the idol is carried in a public procession with music and group chanting, then immersed in nearby water body such as a river or ocean, thereafter the clay idol dissolves and Ganesha is believed to return to Mount Kailash to his parents Parvati and Shiva. Home idols are often ritually immersed in a bucket, tub or tank.

Raksha Bandhan

Raksha Bandhan is observed on the last day of the Hindu month of *Shravana* which typically falls in August. On this day, sisters of all ages tie a talisman, or amulet, called a *rakhi*, around the wrists of their brothers, ritually protecting their brothers, receiving a gift from them in return, and traditionally investing the brothers with a share of the responsibility of their potential care.



Buddha Jayanti

Buddha spent the majority of his life in what is now modern day India. India is the land where the Buddha attained *nirvana* (enlightenment) at Bodhgaya and established Buddhism. *Buddha Purnima* or *Buddha Jayanthi* (as it is known in South India) is a public holiday in India.



Buddhists go to common Viharas to observe a full-length Buddhist sutra, or prayer service. The dress code is pure white. Kheer (a sweet rice porridge) is commonly served. Informally called "Buddha's Birthday", it actually commemorates the birth, enlightenment (*nirvana*), and death (*Parinirvana*) of Gautama Buddha in the Theravada tradition.

Mahaveer Jayanti

Mahavir Janma Kalyanak is one of the most important religious festivals for Jains. It celebrates the birth of Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last Tirthankar. According to Jain

texts, Mahavira was born on the thirteenth day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Chaitra in the year 599 BCE.



On this day, the idol of Mahavira is carried out on a chariot, in a procession called a *rath yatra*. On the way *stavans* (religious rhymes) are recited. Statues of Mahavira are given a ceremonial anointment called the *abhisheka*. During the day, most Jains engage in some charitable act. Many devotees visit temples dedicated to Mahavira to meditate and offer prayers.

Gurupurab

It is one of the most important festivals of Sikhs. It is the celebration of the anniversaries of the ten Sikh Gurus. Special gatherings are arranged on lives and teachings of all the gurus of Sikhism. Community meals, known as *langars*, are organised in the Gurudwaras. *Karah prasad* is distributed and hymn chanting processions are organised at various places. People also decorate their homes with lamps and burst crackers to celebrate Gurupurab.



Baisakhi

It is a historical and religious festival celebrated among both Sikhs and Hindus with the same fervour. For Sikhs, Baisakhi marks the foundation of the Khalsa community by Guru Gobind Singh, who gave a final impetus to the course of the earlier nine Gurus of Sikhism. The festival uniquely follows the solar calendar and is observed on April 13 or 14. It is variously called Rongali Bihu (Assam), Puthandu (Tamil Nadu), Vishu (Kerala) Naba Barsha (West Bengal), Maha Visuva Sankranti (Odisha), and is also celebrated by communities in Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Bihar.



Pongal/Makar Sankranti/Lohri

This winter harvest festival is celebrated in mid-January by numerous communities. In Tamil Nadu, it is the year's most important festival, celebrated over four days and dedicated to the Sun God. The word *pongal* means brimming over, and milk is ritually allowed to boil over the rim of the pot to symbolise plenty. Pongal is also the name of sweet and salty rice-based dishes prepared for the occasion. Local festivities include painting and showcasing of livestock, feeding of birds and decoration of homes with sacred plants representing plenty, such as banana stalks and mango leaves.

Lohri, celebrated on January 13 in Punjab, and Makar Sankranti or Maghi, celebrated on January 14-15 in most other states of India, are other versions of the same festivities.

The festival coincides with the northward movement of the sun, called Uttarayana, in which the sun enters the Capricorn sign of the Indic zodiac, and preempts the gradual heating of the earth until the summer solstice.



Onam

This festival has its origins in the state of Kerala. It falls in the Malayalam month of *Chingam*, which in the Gregorian calendar falls in August–September. It commemorates the Vamana avatar of Vishnu, and also the subsequent homecoming of the legendary emperor Mahabali. It is observed with various festivities like 'Vallam Kali' (boat races), 'Pulikali' (tiger dances), 'Kummattikali' (mask dance) and 'Onavillu' (music). Officially the state festival of Kerala, it is the New Year day for Malayali Hindus.



Other Hindu Festivals

With so many different communities, geographies and customs prevailing in India, there is said to be a festival for every day of the year. Among the more regional festivals are *Chhat*, celebrated in autumn by Biharis and dedicated to the Sun, *Gudi Padwa* or *Ugadi*, celebrated on the first day of the *Chaitra* month in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana and Karnataka, *Mahashivratri*, celebrated by Shiva-worshippers everywhere, *Vasant-Panchami*, the advent of spring, *Janmashtami*, celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna in the rainy month of Shraavan and a host of others, all observed with piety, fervour and zeal.

Eid-ul-Fitr

It is celebrated by Muslims and it marks the end of Ramzan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. People dress up in their finery, attend a special community prayer in the morning, visit friends and relatives and exchange sweets. Children are given *idi* (in the form of money or gifts) by their elders.



The key attractions are the gaily decorated markets and mosques, and vermicelli pudding (sevaiyaan).

Christmas

India has a population of over 25 million Christians, especially in Goa and the states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram, but also significant minorities in most Indian states. The festivities are observed with enthusiasm by people of all religions in India.



Midnight mass is an important service for Christians and is observed on the night of December 24. It is accompanied by a feast containing different delicacies, and the exchange of gifts. In India, churches are decorated with the flowers and candles. Markets offer festival discounts and the newly mushrooming malls across cities are festooned with Christmas ornaments, trees and fairy lights.

Other Festivals

Parsis, a small but important minority in India, observe Navroze or Parsi New Year. Other minority-important festivals include Muhurram, observed by Muslims, including the Gujarati-speaking Dawoodi Bohra community.

National symbols of India

National Flag

The National Flag is a horizontal tricolour of deep saffron(*kesaria*) at the top, white in the middle and dark green at the bottom in equal proportion. The ratio of width of the flag to its length is 2:3. In the centre of the white band is a navy-blue wheel representing the *chakra* or wheel.

The top saffron band indicates the strength and courage of the country. The white middle band indicates peace and truth with *Dharma Chakra* (wheel of law). The green band represents fertility, growth and auspiciousness.

The *Dharma Chakra* is inspired by the wheel that appears on the abacus of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka. Its diameter approximates to the width of the white band and it has 24 spokes. The design of the National Flag was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India on 22 July 1947. Pingali Venkayya is credited with designing the national flag.



National Emblem

The state emblem is an adaptation from the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka. In the original, there are four lions, standing back to back, mounted on an abacus with a frieze carrying sculptures in high relief of an elephant, a galloping horse, a bull and a lion separated by intervening wheels over a bell-shaped lotus. Carved out of a single block of polished sandstone, the Capital is crowned by the Wheel of Law (*Dharma Chakra*).

In the state emblem, adopted by the Government of India on 26 January 1950, only three lions are visible, the fourth being hidden from view. The wheel appears in relief in the centre of the abacus with a bull on the right and a horse on the left and the outlines of other wheels on the extreme right and left. The bell-shaped lotus has been omitted. The

words *Satyameva Jayate* from the *Mundaka Upanishad*, meaning 'Truth Alone Triumphs', are inscribed below the abacus in Devanagari script.



National anthem

The National Anthem of India *Jana-gana-mana*, composed originally in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore, was adopted in its Hindi version by the Constituent Assembly as the National Anthem of India on 24 January 1950. It was first sung on 27 December 1911 at the Kolkata Session of the Indian National Congress.

The complete song consists of five stanzas. The first stanza contains the full version of the National Anthem.

Playing time of the full version of the national anthem is approximately 52 seconds. A short version consisting of the first and last lines of the stanza (playing time approximately 20 seconds) is also played on certain occasions.



National Song

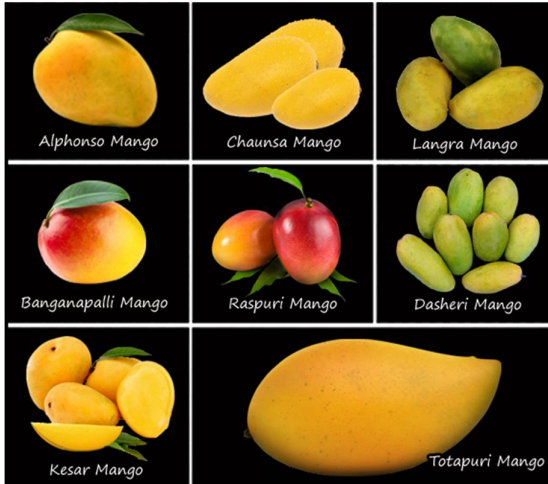
The song *Vande Mataram*, composed in Sanskrit by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, was a source of inspiration to the people in their struggle for freedom. It has equal status with *Jana-gana-mana*. On January 24, 1950, the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad came up with a statement in the Constituent Assembly, "the song Vande Mataram, which has played a historic part in the struggle for Indian freedom, shall be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana and shall have equal status with it."

The first political occasion when it was sung was the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress. The song was a part of Bankimchandra's most famous novel *Anand Math* (1882).



National Fruit

The mango is the national fruit of the country. India is home to more than 100 varieties of the fruit.



National River

The Ganga or the Ganges is the national river of India. It forms the most heavily populated river basin in the world. It is revered by Hindus as the most sacred river on the earth.



National Flower

Lotus (*Nelumbo Nucifera Gaertn*) is the National Flower of India. It is a sacred flower and occupies a unique position in the art and mythology of ancient India and has been an auspicious symbol of Indian culture since time immemorial.



National Tree

Indian fig tree, *Ficus bengalensis*, whose branches root themselves like new trees over a large area. The roots then give rise to more trunks and branches. Because of this characteristic and its longevity, this tree is considered immortal and is an integral part of the myths and legends of India. Even today, the banyan tree is the focal point of village life and the village council meets under the shade of this tree.



National Animal

The magnificent tiger, *Panthera tigris* is a striped animal. It has a thick yellow coat of fur with dark stripes. The combination of grace, strength, agility and enormous power has earned the tiger its pride of place as the national animal of India. Out of eight races of the species known, the Indian race, the Royal Bengal Tiger, is found throughout the country except in the north-western region and also in the neighbouring countries, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. To check the dwindling population of tigers in India, 'Project Tiger' was launched in April 1973. So far, 27 tiger reserves have been established in the country under this project, covering an area of 37,761 sq km. The tiger was chosen as the national animal in 1972, before which the Asiatic Lion (found in Gujarat's Gir Forest) was the national animal of India.



National Bird

The Indian peacock, *Pavo cristatus*, the national bird of India, is a colourful, swan-sized bird, with a fan-shaped crest of feathers, a white patch under the eye and a long, slender neck. The male of the species is more colourful than the female, with a glistening blue breast and neck and a spectacular bronze-green tail of around 200 elongated feathers. The female is brownish, slightly smaller than the male and lacks the tail. The elaborate courtship dance of the male, fanning out the tail and preening its feathers is a gorgeous sight.



National aquatic animal

The river dolphin is India's national aquatic animal. It is found in freshwater is split into two subspecies, the Ganges river dolphin and the Indus river dolphin. Females are larger than males.



National Currency:

The rupee is named after the silver coin, rupiya, first issued by Sher Shah Suri in the 16th century and later continued by the Mughal Empire. The word "rupee" was derived from the Sanskrit word (roopyakam) or rupaya (meaning "wrought silver, a coin of silver"). The Arthashastra, written by Chanakya, mentions silver coins as roopyarupa. Historically, the Rupee was a silver coin.

During British rule the rupee was formed of 16 annas, each in turn comprising 4 paise. Each paisa was further subdivided into 3 pice. Thus a rupee contained $16 * 4 * 3 = 192$ pice.

In 1957, the rupee was decimalised and divided into 100 naye paise (Hindi for "new paise"); in 1964, the initial "naye" was dropped.

Rupee Symbol

The symbol of Indian Rupee typifies India's international identity for money transactions and economic strength. The Indian Rupee sign is an allegory of Indian ethos. The symbol is an amalgam of Devanagari "Ra" and the Roman Capital "R" with two parallel horizontal stripes running at the top representing the national flag and also the "equal to" sign. The Indian Rupee sign was adopted by the Government of India on 15th July, 2010.

The symbol, conceptualised and designed by Udaya Kumar, a post graduate in Design from Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, has been chosen from thousands of concept entries received by the Ministry of Finance through an open competition among resident Indian nationals. The process of establishing and implementing this new identity is underway through various digital technology and computer applications.

Indian Cuisine

Indian cuisine is one of the most diverse and distinct cuisines in the world. The sophisticated and subtle use of various spices gives it its unique identity. The difference in the cooking techniques and use of ingredients across different geographical regions mirrors the varied demographics of the ethnically diverse country. Religion and caste have also played a crucial role in the evolution of Indian cuisine, as a significant portion of population in India is vegetarian, prevalent among specific castes and communities.

India's unique blend of cuisines evolved through the cultural interactions with neighbouring Persia, ancient Greece, Mongols and West Asia. New World foods such as potatoes, tomatoes, chili peppers and squash, introduced by Portuguese and Arab traders during the sixteenth century, and European cooking styles introduced during the colonial period added to the diversity of Indian cuisine. Indian cuisine has also influenced cuisines across the world, especially those of South East Asia. It is now one of the most popular cuisines across the globe, enjoyed not only among the large Indian diaspora but also by the general population in North America, Europe, Australia and parts of Africa.

Bengali Food

Bengali cuisine is known for its use of 'panchphoron', a term used to refer to the five essential spices, namely mustard, fenugreek seed, cumin seed, aniseed, and black cumin seed. The speciality of Bengali food lies in the blend of sweet and spicy flavours. Some of the most popular Bengali food items are Rosogolla, Shukto, Aloo Poto, Posto, Cholar Dal, Shondesh, Mochar Ghonto, Kosha Mangsho, Macher Jhol, Ilish and Phuchka.



Gujarati Food

Traditional Gujarati food is primarily vegetarian and is marked by its distinctly sweet notes in otherwise salty foods. Some of the most popular food items are Chakri, Makai no rotlo, Chorafali, Bhakri, Fafda, phulka rotli, Juvar no rotlo, Undhiu, Murabba, Khakhra, Dhokla and Sev.



Kashmiri Food

Kashmiri food is greatly influenced by the cooking styles of Central Asia, Persia and Afghanistan. Some of the most popular items are Dum Aloo, Kashmiri Chicken, Rogan Josh, Nadier Palak, Aab Ghosht, Gushtaba, Shami Kabab, Dhani Phul, Yakhni and Daniwal Korma. A traditional multi-dish spread, comprising dozens of dishes is called a wazwaan.



Mughlai Cuisine

Mughlai cuisine is one of the most popular cuisines of India and one of its biggest exports. Mughlai cuisine consists of the dishes that were prepared in the kitchens of the royal Mughal Emperors and Nawabs. Some popular items are Murg Musallam, Navratna Korma, Haleem, Mughlai Paratha, Biryani, Murg Kebab, Mughlai, Nargisi Kofta, Boti Kebab, Murg Tandoor. Some cooking traditions synonymous with Mughlai cuisine are *dum pukht* (long-duration cooking of food in its juices under pressure) and *tandoori* (meat or bread cooked in a clay oven called the *tandoor*).



Punjabi Food

The cuisine of Punjab has an enormous variety of mouth-watering vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian dishes. Some of the most popular food items are Butter Chicken, Chicken Tikka, Amritsari Aloo, Chana Masala, Zeera Murg, Makki di roti (cornflour roti) with sarson da saag (curry made of mustard leaves), Kaju Barfi, Pinni and Handi Biryani.

essential accompaniments and tamarind is used as the favoured souring agent.



Popular snack preparations include idli, dosai, vadai, pongal, uthappam, upma, etc. Rice is the staple, served along with side dishes such as sambar, kootu and aviyal and an array of chutneys using coconut, tamarind, curry leaves and/or lentils, and whole spices. Non-vegetarian Tamil cuisine includes the fiery Chettinadu cuisine of the region around Madurai and the fish and seafood dishes along the Coromandel Coast.

Interestingly the word curry is an Anglicization of the Tamil word *kari*. Similarly the Tamil phrase *milagu thanneer* meaning pepper soup, literally pepper water, has been adapted in English as *mulligatawny* (soup).

Kerala Cuisine

The cuisine of Kerala offers a multitude of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes, prepared using fish, poultry and red meat with rice as staple. Chillies, curry leaves, coconut, mustard seeds, turmeric, tamarind and asafoetida are all frequently used.

In fact, Kerala is known as the "Land of Spices" because it traded spices with Europe as well as with many ancient civilisations. Additionally, cultural influences, particularly the large percentages of Muslims and Christians, have also contributed unique dishes and styles to Kerala cuisine, especially non-vegetarian dishes.



One of the traditional Kerala feasts is vegetarian and is called the Kerala Sadya, which is an elaborate banquet prepared for festivals and ceremonies. A full-course Sadya, served on a plantain leaf and consisting of rice with about twenty different accompaniments and desserts is eaten usually on celebratory occasions including marriages, Onam and Vishu.

Karnataka Cuisine

Karnataka cuisine includes dishes like Bisi bele bath, Ragi roti, Vangi bath, Khara bath, etc. Non-vegetarian dishes include Koli Saaru (chicken curry) and Maamsa Saaru (Mutton Curry). The famous Masala Dosa traces its origin to Udupi cuisine. There is some diversity in core food habits of North and South Karnataka. While northern-style dishes have jola and rice as the primary cereals the south uses ragi and rice. Coastal Karnataka is known for its fish preparations.



Udupi cuisine takes its name from Udupi, a city on west coast of Karnataka. Its core is a vast range of creative dishes emphasizing local vegetables and fruits.

Cuisine of Andhra Pradesh & Telangana

Telugu cuisine is generally known for its tangy, hot and spicy taste, but the cooking style is very diverse due to the vast spread of the people and varied topological regions. The state of Andhra Pradesh is the leading producer of red chili and rice, while Telangana leads in the production of millets. The food is one of the richest and spiciest in the world. Vegetarian, as well as meat and seafood (coastal areas), feature prominently on the menus. Spicy and hot varieties of pickles form an important part of Telugu cuisine. Coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana — all have distinctive cuisines.

Telangana, or more specifically the erstwhile princely state (and now city) of Hyderabad, is known for its biryani and haleem, but with regional variations as well.

Odia Cuisine

Compared to other regional Indian cuisines, Odia cuisine uses less oil and is less spicy while nonetheless remaining flavourful. Rice is the staple food of this region. The ingredients used in Odia cuisine are plantains, jackfruit, and papaya. The curries are garnished with dried raw mango (ambula).

The food in the region around Puri-Cuttack is greatly influenced by the Jagannath Temple. On the other hand, kalonji (onion seeds) and mustard paste are used mostly in the region bordering Bengal and curries tend to be sweeter. In the region closer to Andhra Pradesh, curry leaves and tamarind are used more.

One of the most famous Odiya dishes is *Dalma*- made from dal and vegetables. It is generally made from toor dal (pigeon pea) and contains chopped vegetables like green papaya, unripe banana, eggplant, pumpkin, gourd, etc. It is garnished with turmeric, mustard seeds, and panch phutana. There are several variations of this dish.

Bihari Cuisine

The constants are rice, roti, achar (pickle), chutney, and milk products with some variation. People use both vegetable oil and mustard oil and jeera (cumin) or panchforan (literally "five seeds"), namely aniseed, mustard, fenugreek, carom seeds and mangraeel (Kalaunji) for tempering of some vegetables.

Litti-chokha is a famed dish from Bihar. The Litti is shaped like a ball baked in mild fire. The crust is made of a hard dough of wheat flour and filled with a dry amorphous preparation made of Sattu (gram flour) and spices. It is accompanied by chokhaa (mashed potato or brinjals, green chilli and coriander leaves).

Marathi Cuisine

Maharashtrian cuisine includes mild and spicy dishes. Wheat, rice, jowar, bajri, vegetables, lentils and fruit are staples. Peanuts and cashews are often served with vegetables. Distinctly Maharashtrian dishes include *ukdiche modak*, *aluchi patal bhaji* and *usal*.

Traditionally, Maharashtrians have considered their food to be more austere than others.

Maharashtrian snacks and street foods are popular throughout the country. These include: *Pohe*, *upma*, *Vada Pav*, *Pav Bhaji*, *Misal Pav*, *Thalipeeth*, *Sabudana Khichadi* and *Sabudana Vada*.

Seafood is a staple for many coastal communities. Most of the recipes are based on local catch, including prawns and crabs. A distinct Malvani cuisine of mainly seafood dishes is popular. Popular fish varieties include Bombay Duck, locally called *bombil*, pomfret, bangda and surmai.

Cuisine of Goa

As a melting pot of Portuguese and Konkani cultures, Goan cuisine is a delightful amalgamation of locally available ingredients and different cooking styles. Typically Goan dishes include chicken cafreal, pork xacuti, vindaloo and bebinca.

Cuisine of North East India

The first thing to note about North Eastern cuisine is that it cannot be classified in a single category. The traditional foods consumed by the varied people in the North Eastern region are intimately connected to virtually all aspects of their socio-cultural, spiritual life and health.

As a result of the rich tapestry of tribal traditions, topographies, religions (Christianity, Animism, Buddhism, Hinduism and many others) and beliefs, each state in north eastern India has a variety of foods that are distinctly different from the cuisines of the rest of India, often having more in common with other South East Asian cuisines such as Thai, Burmese and Malay dishes. Cooking techniques like steaming, fermenting and pan-frying, ingredients such as raw papaya, pork, river fish, bamboo shoots, noodles and some indigenous spices like the famed Naga chilli, all contribute to unique and interesting dishes.

Traditional Clothing of India

Clothing in India varies across different geographies, ethnicities, climate and religion. India also has a great diversity in terms of weaves, fibres, colours, fabrics and textures. Colour codes are sometimes followed in clothing based on religious or ritualistic demands. Clothing in India also encompasses the wide variety of Indian embroideries, prints, handwork, embellishment and draping styles. In urban areas, western clothing is common and is worn by people across all social levels. Western style has been especially adopted by men across social strata and cultural backgrounds.

Women's clothing

The traditional Salwar-Kurta (or the Salwar-Kameez) was the result of the practice followed by women to wear divided garments during the Mughal era. This dress has survived to this day and has a variant called 'Chooridar' in which the salwar is replaced by tapering pants with folds (or chooris, literally, bangles) near the ankles.

The 'Lehenga', or flowy full skirt is another dress that had its origins during Mughal era. In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the variant of the lehenga – the 'Ghagra Choli' (skirt and bodice) with an odhni or dupatta (stole) still preserves its ethnicity with mirror work and embroidery. Some Rajasthani women wear black 'Ghagra Cholis' with Cowrie shells and mirror work too. During the reign of the Nawabs in Lucknow the 'Sharara' or 'Gharara' was born which was influenced by the 'Ghagra Choli'. A southern style similar to these skirts is the pavadai-chattai (skirt and blouse) or pavadai-daavani skirt and bodice with a stole draped partly like a saree) worn by young and adolescent girls, made of south-weave cotton or silk.

Saree

The saree is an example of Indian attire that enjoys worldwide popularity and recognition. The UNESCO has praised it as "valuable Indian contribution to the world's cultural heritage and diversity". Artisans across the country make use of local resources to produce sarees, which are veritable masterpieces. The beautiful weaves and designs on sarees reflect the creativity of the weavers as well as the local traditions of the region in which they are created. Different regions of India have saree weaves and embellishments. Some famous ones are Chanderi and Maheshwari from Madhya Pradesh, Banarasi saree (with silk or gold thread brocade work), Paithani from Maharashtra (with distinctive parrots, peacocks or lotuses woven into the border and end, called the *pallu*), Kanjivaram silk from Tamil Nadu (woven from pure mulberry silk with fine silk and gold borders and motifs), Patola from Gujarat, Pochampally from Andhra Pradesh and Odisha ikat (three distinct *ikat* weaves in which yarn for warp and weft is first dyed and then woven, creating a beautiful hazy effect), Dhakai and Jamdhani from West Bengal, with their spectacular cotton weaves and motifs, Kasavu, the exquisite off-white and gold saree from Kerala, the buttery soft Mysore silk, the rich Bhagalpuri raw silk from Bihar, the rich golden Muga silk and Mekhala chador from Assam and countless others.



Indian traditional dresses (Women)

Kashmiri and Himachali Dress

The Kashmiri 'Pheran' is a loose woollen gown worn by both men and women with fine contrasting embroidery around the neck and the edges. Himachal Pradesh with its mountainous cold climate has similarly warm clothing, including the famous Kullu woollen cap and shawl. The Himalayan regions are also famous for the light-as-air Pashmina shawls and stoles, the finest of which are rumoured to be able to pass through the eye of a finger ring, and yet keep the wearer warm in the chilly winter.

Dresses of North-East India

'Mekhela Chador' is motif-rich traditional dress worn in the state of Assam and can be seen being worn by Bihu dancers. This dress is made from Muga silk and consists of a skirt-like lower part. The 'Riha' and 'Chador' is worn on the upper part of the body.

The 'Puanchei' is a cherished feminine garment of Mizoram. Paired with the 'Kawrechi' blouse, it is easy to recognise as the typical attire of the Cheraw (Bamboo) dance.

Men's clothing

The unstructured 'Angrakha', a court outfit in medieval times, has paved the way for the modern 'Bandhgala', popular wedding and formal attire. The *Sherwani* also enjoys popularity and is usually paired with a dhoti or pyjama, especially for festive occasions.

North Indian men favour the kurta-pyjama. The Pathani suit, originating from the North West, bordering Afghanistan, is also popular in north India..



Indian traditional dresses (Men)

The *dhoti*, an unstitched piece of plain cloth, is the traditional wear of men in villages in peninsular India. It can be in plain white or off-white, with or without a coloured or gold border. If coloured or patterned in checks, it is referred to as a lungi. Either garment is wrapped around the waist like a sarong. It can be draped in the shape of loose trousers for formal or festive occasions, and there are multiple such drapes. It is known by different names in different parts of India: *veshti* or *veyti* in Tamil, *mundu* in Malayalam, *dhotar* in Marathi, *panche* in Kannada and many other names. The dhoti is also worn in many parts of northern India in its trouser-drape.

A lot of innovation and design in indigenous fashion have engendered hybrid, fusion or "modern" items of apparel, such as the kurta (short kurta), lycra or stretch bodices, stitched sarees or dhotis, the use of zippers, velcro and other contemporary fastenings for traditional clothing, lehenga-gowns, palazzo or harem pants matched with standard issue kameezes, and a phantasmagoria of cross-regional and cross-cultural embellishments, weaves and motifs. Indian designer wear has now gone beyond the so-called NRI market and is making sartorial inroads in global fashionable wardrobes.

Museums of India

The museums of India house many of the greatest artistic works to be produced in the sub-continent. They are like India's rich history and varied traditions in miniature. Initially, most antiques found in India during British rule were transferred for display in British museums, and some priceless examples of Indian art and artefacts can be seen in the Indology sections of museums around the world.

The Indian Museum, Kolkata

The first museum to be established in India was the Indian Museum in Kolkata (then Calcutta) in 1814. It is still the largest museum in India and has rare collections of fossils, antiques, skeletons, armour, mummies and Mughal paintings. The idea was conceived by the Asiatic Society of Bengal which was created by Sir William Jones in 1784.



The Indian Museum, Kolkata

It is divided into six sections comprising thirty-five galleries. The six sections are Art, Archaeology, Anthropology, Geology, Zoology and Economic Botany. The Zoological and Anthropological sections of the museum resulted in the 'Zoological Survey of India' in 1916, and 'Anthropological Survey of India' in 1945. The Indian Museum has been included in the seventh schedule of the Constitution of India as an 'institute of national importance'.

National Museum, New Delhi

The blueprint for the establishment of the National Museum was given by the Maurice Gwyer Committee in 1946. The Royal Academy, London organised an exhibition of Indian Art with the cooperation of the Governments of India and Britain. The exhibition was displayed in the galleries of Burlington House, London in 1947-48. An exhibition planned in Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi in 1949 turned out to be very successful, and paved the way for the establishment of the National Museum.

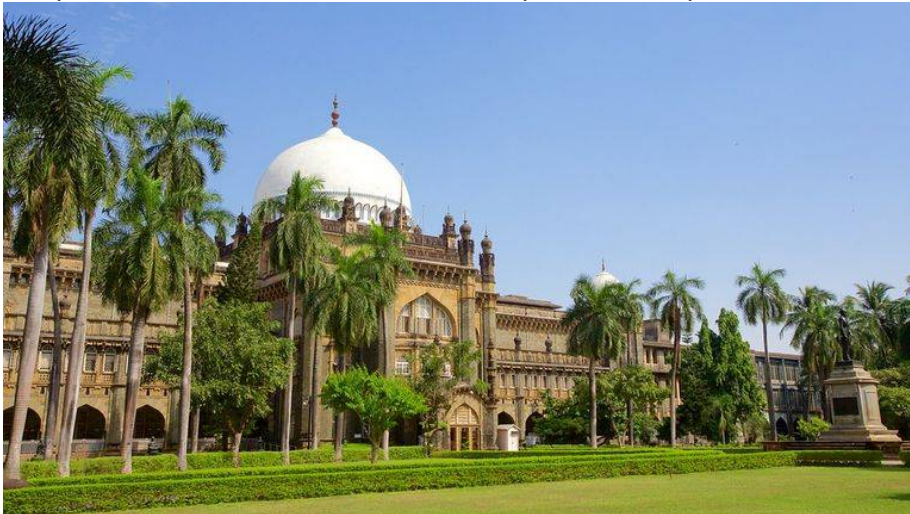


National Museum, New Delhi

On 15 August, 1949, the National Museum was inaugurated by Shri C. Rajagopalachari, the Governor-General of India, in Rashtrapati Bhawan. Later it moved to its present premises. The museum presently holds approximately 2,00,000 diverse objects, covering a time span of more than 5000 years of Indian cultural heritage. Until 1957, the museum was under the care of 'Director General of Archaeology', after which the Ministry of Education placed it under its direct control. At present, the museum is under the administrative control of Ministry of Culture.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai (CSMVS)

A fine example of the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture, CSMVS as an idea was conceived on 14 August, 1905. The foundation stone was laid by the Prince of Wales on 11 November, 1905, and it was named the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India. The building was completed in 1914 and the museum was opened to the public on 10 January, 1922.



Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai

The museum was renamed in 1998 after the warrior king and founder of the Maratha empire, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The museum houses approximately 50,000 exhibits, categorised primarily into three sections: Art, Archaeology and Natural History. It has an outstanding collection of sculptures, bronzes, terracotta pieces, ivory from China and Japan, European paintings, etc. The museum has two unique sections: the Forestry Section, which has specimens of timber grown in British India, and the Maritime Heritage Gallery, which displays navigation artefacts. It has been awarded the 2010 UNESCO Asia – Pacific Heritage Award for cultural heritage conservation.

Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad

The tradition of art-collection had been in the Salar Jung family for three generations. As a result, Nawab Mir Yousuf Ali Khan, popularly known as Salar Jung III, had a large collection of objets d'art. After his demise, the vast collection remained in his ancestral palace. The Salar Jung Museum was established and opened to public by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru on 16 December, 1951. The museum was administered directly by the Government of India until 1961, when it was declared to be an 'Institution of National Importance' through an Act of Parliament, and the administration was entrusted to an autonomous Board of Trustees.



Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad

The museum has a vast collection of art objects and antiques from the West, and a sizeable collection from the Middle East. There is a Children's Section with a rich collection of reference books and rare manuscripts. There are a good number of Arabic and Persian manuscripts dating back to the 19th century, and the *Shah-nama* by Firdausi. A rare manuscript of the *Lilawati*, an ancient treatise on mathematics and an ancient medical encyclopaedia transcribed in India also form part of the collection.

Government Institutions

Today several institutions across India promote the preservation, growth and development of Indian culture. Some of the major institutions are detailed here.

The Academy of Fine Arts

One of the oldest fine art societies, The Academy of Fine Arts was set up in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1933 by Lady Ranu Mukherjee.



The Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata

Located on Cathedral Road, the vibrant galleries of the academy boast of some of the classic paintings in the history of art, including those by Abanindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy.

Archaeological Survey of India

The Archaeological Survey of India was established by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1861. It is now a Government of India organisation responsible for archaeological research and the conservation and preservation of cultural monuments in the country.

Anthropological Survey of India



ANTHROPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA
Ministry of Culture - Government of India

Founded in 1945 as the Anthropological Research of India in Varanasi, the Anthropological Survey of India was later shifted to Kolkata as the apex institution for Anthropological studies and field data research for human and cultural aspects.

Asiatic Society, Kolkata



Asiatic Society, Kolkata

The Asiatic Society was founded in 1784 in Calcutta by Sir William Jones, an eminent Indologist and Justice of the Supreme Court at Fort William. It aims at inquiring into the history, antiquities, art, science and literature of Asia.

Bharat Bhavan



Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal

Bharat Bhavan is an independent trust created by the legislature of the state of Madhya Pradesh, in 1982. Housed in an architectural masterpiece designed by renowned architect Charles Correa, it is a multi-arts complex providing interactive proximity of the verbal, visual and performing arts.

Centre for Cultural Resources and Training



Established in 1969, the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training is an autonomous organisation which comes under the Ministry of Culture. The broad objective of the centre is to revitalize the educational system by creating an understanding and awareness among students regarding the plurality of regional cultures in India.

Indian Council for Cultural Relations



Indian Council for Cultural Relations
भारतीय सांस्कृतिक सम्बंध परिषद्

Founded on 9 April 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the ICCR is involved in India's external cultural relations through cultural exchange with other countries and their people. It has its headquarters in Azad Bhavan, New Delhi.

Indian Council of Historical Research



Set up in 1972, the Indian Council of Historical Research enunciates and implements a national policy of historical research and offers research projects,

Indian Institute of Islamic Studies

Indian Institute of Islamic Studies was set up in 1963 at New Delhi with objectives such as promotion of the study of Islamic culture and civilisation, and intercourse between scholars and institutions engaged in Islamic studies in different countries.

Kalakshetra



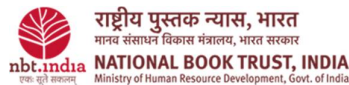
Kalakshetra was founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale in 1936 in Chennai (then Madras) as a cultural academy for the preservation of traditional values in Indian art, especially in classical dance and music.

National Archives of India



The National Archives of India is one of the largest and best equipped repositories of records. Since its establishment in 1891, it has acquired and preserved more than half a million documents, manuscripts and maps.

National Book Trust



The National Book Trust was set up by the Government of India in 1957 to produce and encourage the production of good literature and make it available at cheaper prices.

National Centre for Performing Arts



National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai

National Centre for Performing Arts, set up in 1966, began as a non-profit cultural organisation. The centre is engaged in the preservation and promotion of India's rich cultural heritage in classical and folk music, dance, and drama.

National Library of India



The National Library of India, Kolkata

The National Library of India, situated in Kolkata, is housed in the erstwhile home of the lieutenant- governors and viceroys. It was established in 1836. The library is designated to collect, disseminate and preserve printed material produced in India. It is the largest in India with a collection in excess of 2.2 million books

Sahitya Akademi



साहित्य अकादेमी

The Sahitya Akademi was set up by the Government of India in 1954. It has an advisory board for the 24 languages it recognises. It promotes the cause of Indian literature through publication, translation, seminars, workshops and literary meets.

Sangeet Natak Akademi



The Sangeet Natak Akademi was established in 1953 as an autonomous organisation. It promotes the development of music, dance, and drama. Even the prestigious National School of Drama, under the Ministry of Culture, was set up by Sangeet Natak Akademi.

National Research Laboratory for Conservation



National Research Laboratory for Conservation, Lucknow

The NRLC was established in 1976 by the Department of Culture to carry out research in the methods of conservation, and for providing technical assistance and training to other museums, archaeological departments and related institutions.

National Council of Educational Research and Training

विद्यया ऽ मृतमश्नुते



एन सी ई आर टी
NCERT

The NCERT was established in 1961, and implements the policies and programmes of the ministry, and works in close cooperation with the state and central education departments, universities and other institutions for promoting school education. It also brings out model textbooks in all subjects for school children.

Lalit Kala Akademi



The Government of India established the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1954 to promote understanding of Indian Art, both within and outside the country. The Akademi strives to promote these objectives through exhibitions, publications, workshops and camps.

Places of Cultural Interest

Amarnath



Amarnath, Anantnag, Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir

At a height of 12729 feet above the sea level in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the cave is considered to be the residing place of Lord Shiva and his wife, Parvati. It is an important pilgrimage site for Hindus. The Shivalingam at this site, a natural formation of ice, changes size with the seasons.

Amritsar



Golden Temple, Amritsar

This city situated close to the Pakistan border was founded by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh guru in 1581, named after the sacred ambrosial tank in the middle of which the Golden Temple (the holiest shrine of Sikhs) is built.

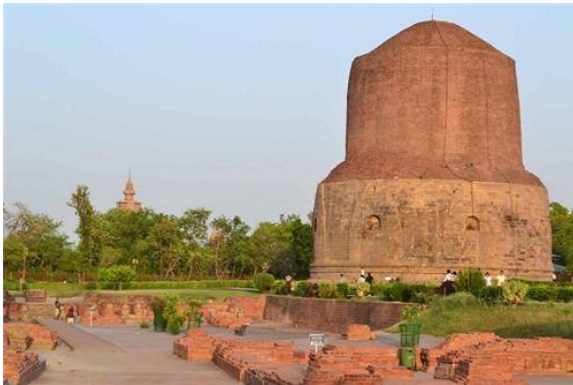
Auroville



Matrimandir, Auroville

The town was conceived as a centre for world brotherhood where people, irrespective of creeds and nationalities, could co-exist in peace and harmony. It was laid out in a manner that it would reflect the core philosophical principles of Sri Aurobindo.

Sarnath



Dhamekh stupa, Sarnath

This is the site where Gautam Buddha delivered his first sermon. The Dhamekh stupa stands commemorative of this event. This is also the place where Ashoka is said to have meditated after his conversion to Buddhism.

Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa



Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa

The church is an important shrine for Catholic Christians around the world as it houses the remains of St. Francis Xavier who died there in 1552. The body can be viewed once in 10 years on the anniversary of the saint's death.

Shravanabelagola



Bahubali, Karnataka

It is one of the most ancient and important Jain pilgrimage sites, famous for its 17metre tall monolithic statue of Bahubali. Every 12 years, Jain pilgrims from all over the world, flock to bear witness to the Mahamastakabhishek, in which the statue is bathed with milk, ghee, turmeric, vermilion, and coconut water.

Shantiniketan



Shantiniketan, Kolkata

Established by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore in 1901 as an open-air institution, it became a Central University in 1951. The university campus has a large number of sculptures, murals, paintings and bhavans which promote researches on their respective subjects.

Jama Masjid, Delhi



Jama Masjid, Delhi

It was built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan between 1644 and 1656 at a (then) cost of 1 million rupees. The mosque was completed in 1656 AD with three great gates, four towers and two 40 metres high minarets constructed with strips of red sandstone and white marble.

Belur Math



Belur Math, Belur, Howrah, West Bengal

The headquarters of the Ramkrishna Mission, the Belur Math was set up by Swami Vivekananda in 1899 on the banks of river Ganga. The complex also has a mosque, church and a temple representative of its secular establishment.

Badrinath



Badrinath, Uttarakhand

Located on the picturesque snow-capped peaks of Uttarakhand, Badrinath is one of the four major dhams in Hinduism. It is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the Protector and Propagator in Hindu Trinity.

Kaushambi



Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh

This is the resting place of the Buddha. Apart from that, it is also a site where Ashoka erected a pillar in order to spread Dhamma.

Nalanda University, Bihar



Nalanda University, Bihar

One of the earliest universities, Nalanda was arguably the greatest site of Buddhist learning. It was so influential that scholars from as far as China like Hiuen Tsang came to study and teach here. It was later razed to ruins by invaders like Bakhtiyar Khilji. A modern private university of the same name has been recently set up.

Vaishno Devi Temple, Jammu and Kashmir



*The Holy Pindies - Mata Maha Saraswati, Mata Maha Lakshmi, Mata Maha Kali
(Left to Right)*

Some 40 km from Jammu, Vaishno Devi is situated on a hill. It is dedicated to the three Mother Goddesses: Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Durga. Pilgrims have to traverse a mountainous road leading to the shrine.

Vivekananda Memorial



Vivekanand Rock Memorial, Tamil Nadu

The Vivekananda Memorial at Kanyakumari was built in 1970 on a rock where Swami Vivekananda meditated before leaving for the Parliament of religions meeting in Chicago.

Vasco da Gama Church, Goa



Vasco da Gama Church, Goa

Also called St. Francis Church, it was the first church in India to be built in the European tradition. The original building of 1510 was later replaced by another made of stone. Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer was buried here.

Jagannath Temple, Puri



Shri Jagannath Temple, Puri, Odisha

A popular pilgrimage destination for followers of the Vaishnav traditions, the Jagannath Temple at Puri allows all Hindus irrespective of their caste affiliations to visit the temple. The annual 'Ratha Yatra' or (chariot festival) that takes place around July is a major attraction of this temple.

Lake Palace, Udaipur



Lake Palace, Udaipur, Rajasthan

Often referred to as the 'Venice of the East', the city of Udaipur was constructed by the Sisodia clan of Mewar as their capital city. Also known as the city of lakes, it offers a feast to the eyes of those who visit the city.

Somnath Temple, Gujarat



Somnath Temple, Gujarat

Somnath is a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Legend says that it was constructed in gold by the moon god, in silver by Ravana and in sandalwood by Shri Krishna; the structure has borne the brunt of multiple invaders over the course of time. A plaque at Somnath points an arrow towards the South Pole; in fact, there is no land mass between this point and Antarctica!

Padmanabhaswamy temple, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala



The Padmanabhaswamy temple is one of the richest temples in the world with a vast treasury full of gold. It boasts of a life-size golden statue of the 'reclining Vishnu', and attracts devotees from all over the world.

Jain Temple Complex, Ranakpur

Located in the Aravalli hill range near Udaipur, Ranakpur has some of the most beautiful Jain temples in India.



Mesmerizing Artwork

The main temple is the Adinath temple, made in marble in 1439, with 29 halls bearing 1444 pillars, each distinct from the rest.

Venkateswara Temple, Tirumala

Venkateswara Temple is a landmark Vaishnavite temple situated in the hill town of Tirumala at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. It is dedicated to Lord Sri Venkateswara, an incarnation of Vishnu, who is believed to have appeared here to save mankind from the trials and troubles of Kali Yuga. For this reason, it is regarded as Kali Yuga Vaikuntham.



The temple is also known as the Tirumala Temple, Tirupati Temple or Tirupati Balaji Temple. Lord Venkateswara is known by many other names including Balaji, Govinda, and Srinivasa.

It is the richest temple in the world in terms of donations received and wealth. The temple is visited by about 50,000 to 100,000 pilgrims daily, while on special occasions and festivals, like the annual Brahmotsavam, the number of pilgrims shoots up to 500,000, making it the most-visited holy place in the world.

Meenakshi Temple, Madurai

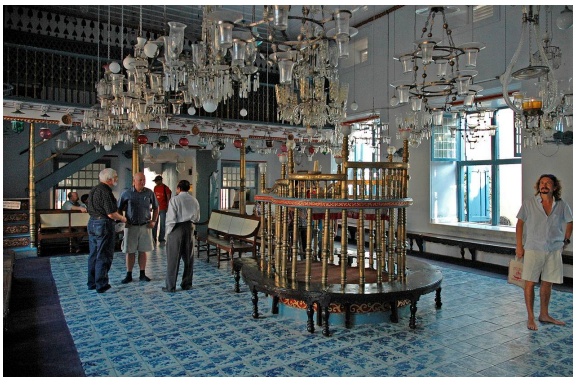
The Meenakshi Amman Temple is a historic temple located on the southern bank of the Vaigai River in the temple city of Madurai in Tamil Nadu. It is dedicated to Parvati, known here as Meenakshi, and her consort, Lord Shiva, worshipped here as Sundareswarar.



According to legend the temple was originally built in the 6th century BCE. The present day structures were largely built by the Nayaks, who ruled Madurai from the 16th to the 18th century. The temple is known for its 12 Gopurams (or Gateway Towers).

Paradesi Synagogue, Jew Town, Cochin

The Paradesi Synagogue is the oldest active synagogue in Commonwealth of Nations. Constructed in 1567, it is one of seven synagogues of the *Malabar Yehudan* or Cochin Jewish community in Kerala. It is called the Paradesi Synagogue because it was built by the Sephardic Jews who were foreigners. *Paradesi* is a word that means 'foreigner' in several Indian languages.



It is also called the Cochin Jewish Synagogue or the Mattancherry Synagogue.

Kumbh Mela

The Kumbha Mela, inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is a mass gathering in which Hindus gather to bathe in a sacred or holy river. Traditionally, four fairs are widely recognized as the Kumbh Melas- held at Haridwar, Allahabad (Prayag), Nashik (Trimbakeshwar) and Ujjain. The main festival site is located on the banks of a river: the Ganges at Haridwar; the confluence (triveni sangam) of the Ganges,

Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati at Allahabad; the Gofavari at Nashik; and the Shipra at Ujjain. Bathing in these rivers is thought to cleanse a person of all sins.



According to medieval Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu dropped drops of Amrita (the nectar of immortality) at four places, while transporting it in a 'Kumbha'(pot). These four places are identified as the present-day sites of the Kumbh Mela.

The festival is considered as the "world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims". There is no precise method of ascertaining the number of pilgrims, and the estimates of the number of pilgrims bathing on the most auspicious day may vary. An estimated 120 million people visited Maha Kumbh Mela in 2013 in Allahabad over a two-month period, including over 30 million on a single day, on 10 February 2013, the day of Mauni Amavasya.

Republic Day

“At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she [India] has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength”.

- Jawaharlal Nehru

This was part of the historic declaration made by one of our foremost freedom fighters Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the context of Republic Day. With these words, he feted the independence that India and her people had earned after decades of struggle, sacrifice and hard toil.

However, before we try to delve deeper into the concept of the much revered Republic Day, we need to understand the significance of the word “Republic” and what it implies. In the political context of India, the word Republic finds mention in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. As we all know, the Preamble forms the backbone of the Indian Constitution, outlining its overall spirit and character. Essentially, a republic is a form of government in which the country or nation is considered a “public matter”, not the private concern or property of the rulers. Also, a republic signifies that the primary positions of power or the bodies of power at the apex within the republic are not inherited and are instead elected by the wider citizenry, with a conscious political choice. Therefore, in short, it refers to a form of government in which the head of state or government is not a monarch but an elected representative of the people.

The political spirit of a nation is reflected in its entirety in the most sacred document of the nation – its Constitution. The leaders of the Constituent Assembly too decided to take a similar course of action in this regard. Thanks to their laudable efforts and far-sighted vision in designing a political structure and framework for the nation, the Constitution of India came to fruition, almost 2 years, 11 months and 18 days from the date of commencement of work.

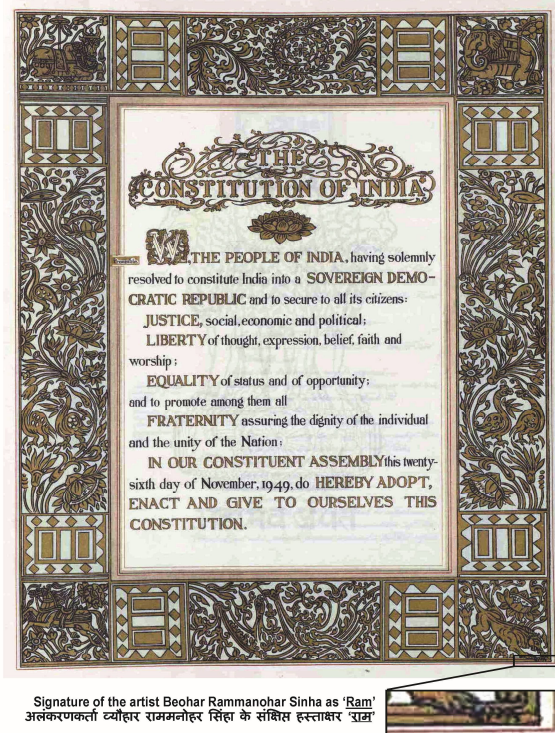
The historic day of 26 January was chosen as the Republic day because it was on this day in 1930 that the Declaration of Indian Independence (Purna Swaraj) was proclaimed by the Indian

National Congress in opposition to the Dominion status offered by the British Regime. The Purna Swaraj declaration was promulgated by the Indian National Congress on 19 December 1929 at its Lahore session. Through this declaration, the Indian National Congress and Indian nationalists resolved to fight for Purna Swaraj, or complete self-rule and independence from the British Empire. This very spirit infused in the people the sense of a republic and of building a republic nation in the long run. Continuing with this spirit, the Congress asked the people of India to observe 26th of January as its Independence Day. The flag of India was publicly hoisted across India by Congress volunteers, nationalists and the public.



Purna Swaraj (Independence) Resolution

After the Constitution of India was successfully drafted and adopted on 26th November 1949, it was decided to be enforced with full effect from 26th January 1950. Thus, we see that the Republic Day honours the date on which the Constitution of India came into effect, replacing the Government of India Act (1935) which was originally passed in August 1935. It is said to be the longest Act of Parliament ever enacted at that time, surpassed only by the Greater London Authority Act 1999, 64 years later.



The original text of the Preamble to the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India came into force on 26 January 1950.

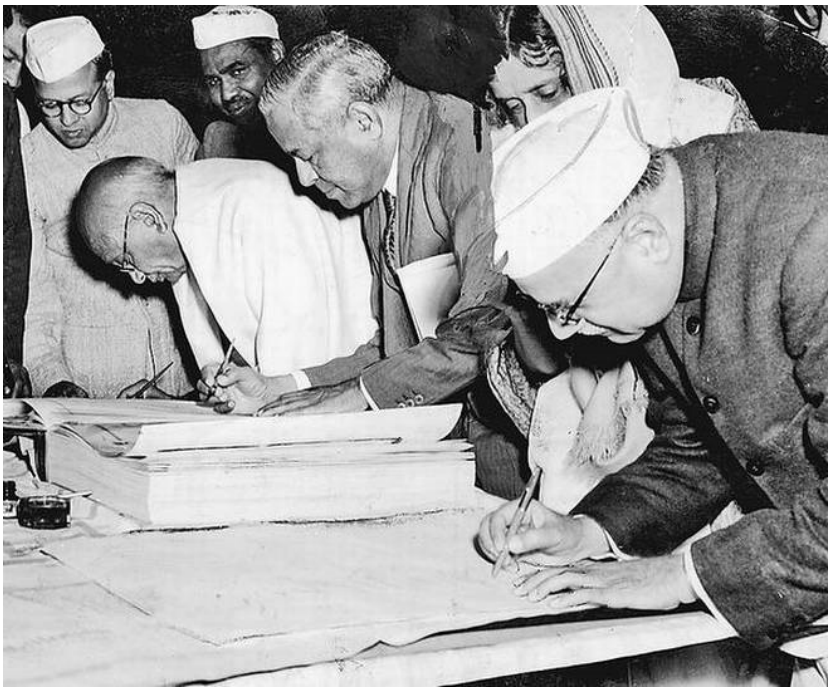
History:

After attaining independence from the British on August 15, 1947, India was an independent dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations. The British monarch King George VI was still officially India's head of the state even though it was a fully independent sovereign state. It was only after the Constitution of India came into effect on January 26, 1950 that India became a federal, democratic republic within the Commonwealth, abolishing the monarchy.

On 28 August 1947, the Drafting Committee was appointed to draft a permanent Constitution, with Dr B R Ambedkar as the chairman and under his chairmanship a draft Constitution was prepared by the Committee and was submitted to the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1947.

Granville Austin described the Indian Constitution drafted by Ambedkar as 'first and foremost a social document'. The majority of India's constitutional provisions are either directly arrived at furthering the aim of social revolution or attempt to foster this revolution by establishing conditions necessary for its achievement.

Before adopting the Constitution, the Constituent Assembly met, in sessions open to public, for 166 days, spread over a period of two years, eleven months and eighteen days. After many deliberations and some modifications, the 308 members of the Constituent Assembly signed two hand-written copies of the document (one each in Hindi and English) on 24 January 1950. Two days later, on 26 January 1950, it came into effect and the nation received its own Constitution, two months after its adoption on 26 November 1949 by the Constituent Assembly.



The New Constitution of India signed by the members of Constituent Assembly

Under the transitional provisions of the new Constitution, the Constituent Assembly became the Parliament of India and this date has been since then celebrated as Republic Day.

Importance:

Republic Day is an extremely important day for our country for various reasons. The word 'republic' is mentioned in the preamble of the Indian Constitution and the pledge in the preamble to our Constitution talks of India as a "sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic,

republic". Each of these is an ideal that forms the foundation on which this nation is built. Republic Day is one such event that reminds us of the elevated values enshrined in this sacred document that we call our Constitution.

The Constitution of India empowered the citizens of India to govern themselves by selecting their own government and the leaders, and selected Dr. Rajendra Prasad as the first Indian President and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as the first Indian Prime Minister.

In India, Republic Day celebrations not only symbolise the nation's identity as a republican state but also celebrate its freedom. On this auspicious day, a variety of activities are organised, including military parades, demonstration of military equipment, cultural activities of states and students to demonstrate the Indian culture and tradition, etc. Being patriotic is synonymous with celebrating the important milestones of the country and every citizen of India is expected to his/her respects to the country's history.



Republic Day celebrations during the 1950s

Celebration:

In India, Republic Day is one of the most significant national events, and is celebrated with great enthusiasm by people throughout the country. It is a three-day long celebration, accompanied by performances and drill. The Beating Retreat marks the end of the celebrations.

Since 1950, India has organised an event every year to celebrate Republic Day, traditionally at Rajpath, India Gate, New Delhi. However, for four years (1951-1954), this event was organised at different places like Irwin Stadium, Red Fort, Kingsway, and Ramlila Grounds.

The main Republic Day celebration is held in the national capital, New Delhi, on Rajpath (formerly King's Way) in the presence of the honourable President of India. This day witnesses ceremonial parades taking place on Rajpath performed as a tribute to India; its unity in diversity and rich cultural heritage. In order to honour the Indian National Flag and the great soldiers who died protecting their country, a Republic Day parade is also performed at Rajpath.



The Republic Day celebrations through the ages

The Christian hymn 'Abide with Me', considered Mahatma Gandhi's favourite, is also played at the Republic Day function. The three-day long celebration also includes illumination of important government buildings.

Delhi Republic Day parade:

The Republic Day Parade held in New Delhi is organised by the Ministry of Defence. It commences at the gates of Rashtrapati Bhavan (the President's Palace), Raisina Hill on Rajpath.

The parade involves the demonstration of special activities by the three wings of the armed forces – Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force, accompanied by delightful performances of traditional dance troupes from Indian states, cultural activities by school children, etc.

A floral tribute is paid by the Prime Minister of India at Amar Jawan Jyoti (the eternal flame), prior to the commencement of the celebration at India Gate in order to honour Indian soldiers or jawans who died for their country. It is a solemn reminder of the sacrifice of the martyrs who died in the freedom movement and the subsequent wars for the defence of their country's sovereignty.

The ceremony begins with a salute given to the India's President by the Indian military during the parade. A fly past event takes place by the Indian Air Force through fighter planes who shower rose petals.



The PM of India paying his tribute at the Amar Jawan Jyoti

As the President unfurls the National Flag, the national anthem is played and he is given a 21 gun salute by the Navy and Army. This is followed by the award ceremony where bravery awards like Veer Chakra, Maha Veer Chakra, Param Veer Chakra, Kirti Chakra and Ashoka Chakra are awarded. The President gives away bravery medals to soldiers and officers from the armed forces for their exceptional courage in the field and also civilians who have distinguished themselves by acts of valour in different situations to protect the nation. Children receiving the National Bravery Award ride past the spectators on colourfully decorated elephants or vehicles.



The Republic Day Parade at India Gate, New Delhi

Nine to twelve different regiments of the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force with their bands march past in all their finery and official decorations. The President of India who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Armed Forces, takes the salute. Among others are the twelve contingents of various para-military forces of India and other civil forces also take part in this parade.



Display of military and technological marvels

One of the unique sights of the parade is the camel mounted Border Security Force contingent, which is the only camel mounted military force in the world. The best N.C.C. cadets, selected from all over the country, consider it an honour to participate in this event, as do school children from various schools in the capital, since they get an opportunity to showcase their talent.



The camel mounted parade by the Border Security Force contingent

In the grand parade, up to 30 floats exhibiting the cultures of the various States and Union Territories of India, including floats of Union Ministries and State enterprises are displayed. The entire parade is broadcast nationwide on television and radio. These moving exhibits depict not only tableaux depicting traditional activities, crafts and costumes but also music and songs from each state. Each display brings out the diversity and richness of the culture of Indian states, adding to the festive air of the occasion. Nearly 1200 schoolchildren perform folk dances as part of the parade.



Maharashtra float at the Republic day parade displaying Shivaji's coronation

The parade traditionally ends with dare devil motor cycle riding displays by the motorcycle units of the Armed Forces and Civil Security Services and also a flypast by the Indian Air Force jets and helicopters carrying the national flag along with the flags of the three services. The 25 plus marching and mounted contingents, various military vehicles, 20 military bands, 30 cultural tableaux and 30 aircraft together with the cultural performances and the participation of 1200 school children all make India's Republic Day celebration very popular worldwide .



The daredevils act by motorcycle units of Armed Forces

A full dress rehearsal is organised on 23 January each year to take stock of the preparedness.



Aerial view of the Republic Day parade

Beating Retreat:

Originally known as watch setting which was initiated at sunset by the firing of a single round from the evening gun, the Beating Retreat is a military ceremony dating to 16th century England which was first used to recall nearby patrolling units to the castle.

In India, Beating the Retreat is a ceremony that is conducted on the third day from 26 January, officially marking the end of Republic Day celebrations. It is performed by the bands of the three wings of the armed forces: the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force. The venue for this ceremony is Raisina Hill and its adjacent square, Vijay Chowk, flanked by the North and South blocks of government adjacent to Rashtrapati Bhavan at one end of Rajpath.



Beating the Retreat ceremony at Vijay Chowk

The Chief Guest of the function is the President of India who arrives escorted by the President's Bodyguards (PBG), a cavalry unit. With the arrival of the President, a fanfare is sounded by the trumpeters of the Brigade of the Guards, and then the PBG commander asks the unit to give the National Salute, which is followed by the playing of the Indian National Anthem Jana Gana Mana by the Massed Bands, and at the same time the Flag of India is unfurled on the flagpole at Vijay Chowk. Exactly at 6 pm, along with the sound of bugles, the National Flag is lowered, and the National Anthem is sung. This concludes the three day long Republic Day celebrations in India.

Chief Guests for Republic Day parade:

According to Indian culture, "Atithi Devo Bhava" (a guest is like God), and thus traditionally invites a Chief Guest such as Prime Minister, President or Head of State from another country, to India for the Republic Day celebrations. The guest country is chosen by India after a deliberation of strategic, economic and political interests. From the 1950s through the 1970s, India hosted several NAM and Eastern Bloc countries.

The years 1952 and 1953 were exceptions, when India did not host any foreign guests. Indonesian President Sukarno was the first to attend the Republic Day celebration in India as Guest of Honour in 1950, followed by King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah of Nepal in 1951.

Some countries have received numerous invitations to attend the Republic Day Parade in India.

- France and UK - 5 times
- Bhutan, Russia/USSR - 4 times
- Indonesia, Mauritius - 3 times
- Brazil, Japan, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam - 2 times.

Chief guests for 2018:

For the first time in Indian history, the Government of India invited leaders of 10 ASEAN nations as Chief Guests for the Republic Day parade and celebrations on January 26, 2018.

ASEAN (Association of South East Nations), whose members include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam joined India for the festivities.

India and ASEAN had already upgraded their relationship to a strategic partnership in 2012, and the government has since sought to impart strategic content to relations by focusing on stepping up defence and security ties with these countries.



The ASEAN delegates who attended the Republic Day parade, 2018

Conclusion:

Paying respects to one's country is the duty of a responsible citizen. As citizens of a free country, we should feel proud to be Indians and pay obeisance to all those who helped our motherland free herself from the clutch of foreign rulers and emerge as a strong sovereign nation. Republic Day provides us that precious occasion to especially remember our freedom fighters and soldiers who made and continue to make incomparable sacrifices so that all of us can live in a free and better India.

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee

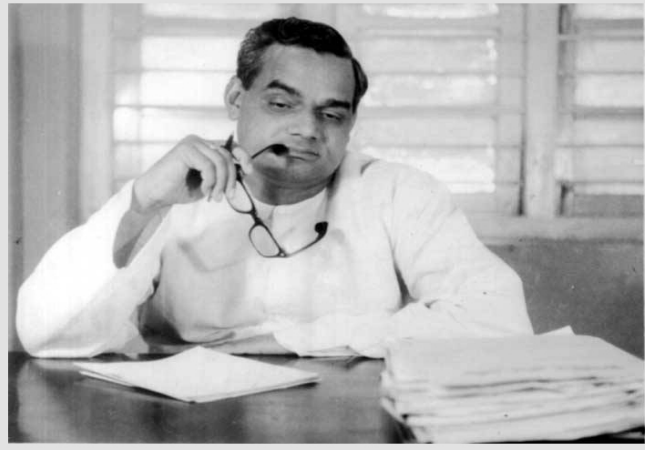
Introduction:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a veteran Indian politician, known for his liberalism, cultural moderation and political reasonableness was the 10th Prime Minister of India. He served as Prime Minister of India for three non-consecutive terms – first for a term of 15 days in 1996, then for a period of 13 months from 1998 - 1999 and the third time for a full five-year term, from 1999 -2004.

Vajpayee was a member of the Indian Parliament for almost five decades, having been elected 10 times to the Lok Sabha, the Lower House and 2 times to the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House. He contested from four different States – Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Gujarat in different elections. He was best known for his oratory skills and held several prestigious positions before being elected as the Prime Minister of India.

Early Life:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was born to a middle-class family on 25 December, 1924 in Gwalior, MP to Shri Krishna Bihari Vajpayee, who was a school teacher and a poet, and Smt. Krishna Devi. He did his schooling from Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Gorkhi in Guwalior. He then completed his graduation from Victoria College (now known as Laxmi Bai College) in Hindi, English and Sanskrit. Thereafter, he studied at DAV College in Kanpur and earned his Master's Degree in Political Science. Although he enrolled himself in Law studies, he gave it up due to partition riots.



Vajpayee during his initial years as leader of RJS

He was a true patriot at heart and even as a student he participated in India's struggle for Freedom and edited several Hindi newspapers, including Rashtradharma (a Hindi monthly), Panchjanya (a Hindi weekly) and dailies such as Swadesh and Veer Arjun. Vajpayee joined the youth wing of Arya Samaj known as Arya Kumar Sabha, and in 1944 he became the General Secretary of this wing.

Beginning of his Political Career:

Vajpayee began his political career as a freedom fighter. In the year 1939, he joined Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) as a Swayamsewak, or volunteer. By 1942, he became an active member and in 1947 he became a pracharak (a full-time worker). However, his first incursion to politics was during the pre-independence era when he took part in the Quit India Movement, leading to his arrest and imprisonment for 24 days along with his brother Prem in August 1942.

Later on, he joined the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) a political party under the leadership of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, and soon became a follower and aide of the party leader, supporting him during his fast-unto-death in Kashmir in 1954. He was appointed as a National Secretary of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in-charge of the northern region. He can be regarded as one of the founding members of BJS.

In 1957, for the first time, Vajpayee was elected from Balrampur (UP) to the Parliament (Lok Sabha) as a member of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a forerunner of BJP.

In 1968, after the death of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, Vajpayee was made the National President of Jana Sangh. His oratorical skills won him the reputation of being the most eloquent defender of the Jana Sangh's policies. He worked tirelessly for the next few years and with the constant support of his colleagues Nanaji Desmukh, Balraj Madhok and Lal Krishna Advani, he took the Jana Sangh to great glory.

It was in 1975, that he participated in the "Total Revolution Movement" launched by Jay Prakash Narayan against the internal emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Vajpayee was arrested and jailed along with other opposition members.

In 1977, the BJS was united with Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Socialist Party to form the Janata Party, a grand-alliance against the Indira Gandhi government. In the same year, when Morarji Desai led Janata Party coalition came to power for the first time, Vajpayee became a member of Union Ministry, he was appointed as the Minister of External Affairs. As a Foreign Minister, he became the first person to deliver a speech in Hindi at the UN General Assembly.

Following the resignation of Morarji Desai as PM in 1979, the Janata Party was dissolved. It was in 1980, that Vajpayee along with LK Advani, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and others from Bharatiya Jana Sangh and RSS, formed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).



Vajpayee delivering a speech at a public meeting

In 1993, Vajpayee became the Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament and in 1995, at a BJP conference in Mumbai, he was nominated by BJP as the Prime Ministerial candidate.

His Tenure as Prime Minister of India:

First term: May, 1996

In the 1996 General Elections, BJP emerged as single largest party in the Lok Sabha and Vajpayee was sworn in as the 10th Prime Minister of India. He instantly made his mark in Parliament by his brilliant oratory and articulation. However, his government could not gather support from other parties to obtain a majority and the government collapsed. Following this, Vajpayee resigned after 15 days, thereby becoming the shortest serving Prime Minister of India.

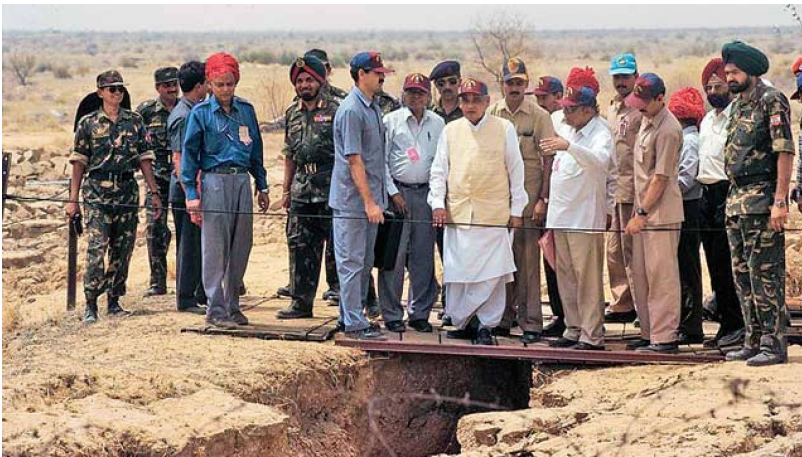
Second term: 1998-1999

In 1998, after the BJP emerged as the single largest party and formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with other political parties, Vajpayee was again sworn in as

Prime Minister of India. It was during this tenure of Vajpayee that the government took several path-breaking decisions. His second term as Prime Minister is perhaps best remembered for the nuclear tests conducted by India at Pokhran in Rajasthan.

Nuclear tests:

24 years after its first nuclear test (Smiling Buddha) in 1974, India conducted five underground nuclear tests in the Pokhran desert in Rajasthan in May, 1998, a month after the Vajpayee led government came into power. These tests were regarded as a national milestone.



Indian Nuclear Test buildup at Pokhran desert in Rajasthan, 1998

The tests were initiated on 11 May 1998, under the assigned code name Operation Shakti, with the detonation of one fusion and two fission bombs. Later on, two additional fission devices were detonated on 13 May 1998. Vajpayee as Prime Minister of India, through a press conference, declared India as a full-fledged nuclear state. Although nations like France endorsed India's right to defensive nuclear power, a number of states including United States, Canada, Japan, Britain and the European Union imposed a variety of sanctions against India.

Domestically, the nuclear tests were popular despite the international criticism and steady decline in foreign investment and trade. Moreover, international sanctions failed to sway India from weaponising its nuclear capability.

In order to commemorate the first of the five nuclear tests that were carried out on 11 May 1998, the government of India has officially declared this day (11th May) as the National Technology Day for the nation. This day is celebrated by giving awards to various individuals and industries in the field of Science and Technology.

Lahore Summit:

In February 1999, Vajpayee inaugurated the historic Delhi-Lahore bus service in order to attain a diplomatic peace process with Pakistan. Moreover, he pitched for permanently resolving the Kashmir dispute and other conflicts with Pakistan in a peaceful manner.

At the conclusion of a historic Lahore session, a treaty known as Lahore Declaration was signed on 21 February 1999 between India and Pakistan. It was a bilateral agreement and governance treaty between India and Pakistan. Under the terms of the treaty, a mutual understanding was reached towards the development of atomic arsenals and to avoid accidental and unauthorised operational use of nuclear weapons.

In the aftermath of the publicly performed atomic tests carried out by both the nations in 1998, the Lahore Declaration signalled a major breakthrough in overcoming the strained bilateral relations between the two nations. However, relations soon lost their momentum with the outbreak of the Kargil War in May 1999.

Kargil War:

The Kargil War (between India and Pakistan) took place somewhere between May and July 1999. In May 1999, some Kashmiri shepherds discovered the presence of Pakistani militants and non-uniformed soldiers, while elsewhere, Pakistani soldiers had infiltrated into the Kashmir valley and captured the border hilltops around the town of Kargil along with Batalik and Akhnoor sectors.



Vajpayee with the Indian soldiers after the victory of Kargil War

The Indian Army responded with Operation Vijay launched on 26 May 1999. Under this operation, Indian Army units fought Pakistani intruders with heavy artillery shelling amidst extremely cold weather and treacherous hilly terrain at high altitudes. With the loss of 500 Indian soldiers and a three month-long dire conflict between the two nations, India emerged victorious, once again proving the indomitable valour of the Indian soldiers.

The Kargil victory strengthened Vajpayee's political image and he emerged as one of the strongest and most able leaders of the nation. However, at this time, the political

party, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) decided to withdraw its political alliance to NDA and Vajpayee's government fell after only 13 months in power.

AIADMK's withdrawal from the coalition:

The AIADMK led by J. Jayalalitha had continually threatened to withdraw from the coalition. Despite many failed attempts by the national leaders who repeatedly visited her and tried to pacify her, the AIADMK ultimately pulled the plug on the NDA in 1999.

Third term: 1999-2004

In the 1999 General Elections, the BJP-led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) once again emerged as the largest political alliance. Vajpayee was made Prime Minister for the third time in 1999 and was able to complete five years term in office as a non-Congress Prime Minister for the first time. He took oath as the Prime Minister of India on 13 October 1999.

During this tenure, Vajpayee took many far-reaching decisions and introduced many economic and infrastructural reforms including encouraging the private sector and foreign investments, bringing about the privatisation of certain government-owned corporations etc. His major focus was on projects like the National Highway Development Projects and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Along with this, in order to boost the economy of India he also adopted a pro-business, free-market approach.

However, his third term also witnessed a national crisis when an Indian Airlines flight IC 814, flying from Kathmandu to New Delhi in December 1999 was hijacked by five terrorists. Instead of following the scheduled course of the flight, the hijackers flew it to Kandahar, Afghanistan. The hijackers made several demands including the release of the dreaded terrorist Maulana Masood Azhar, and the Indian government ultimately caved in to secure the freedom of the captive passengers.

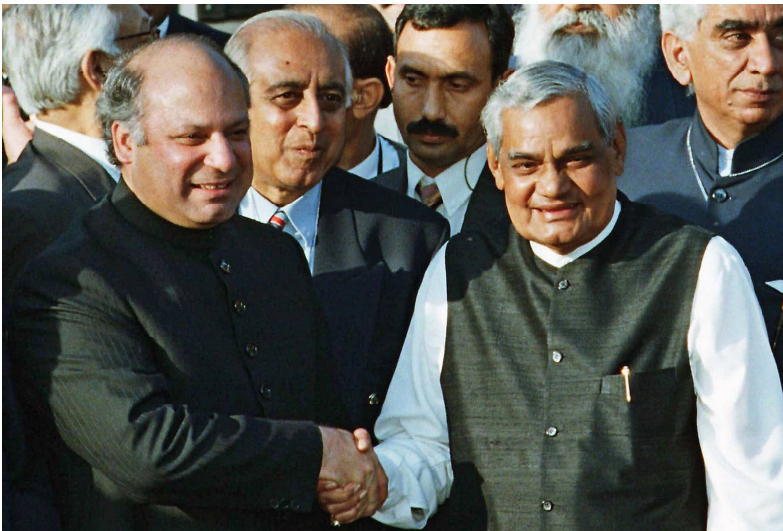
In March 2000, the President of the United States Bill Clinton paid a state visit to India. Clinton's visit to India was treated as significant in improving foreign trade and

economic relations between the two nations. After a wide range of discussions between Vajpayee and Clinton, a vision document on the future course of Indo-U.S. relations was signed.



Atal Bihari Vajpayee with the then US President Bill Clinton during his visit to India

Atal Bihari Vajpayee once again tried to establish peace relations with Pakistan by initiating talks with Pakistan. In 2001, he invited Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf for a joint summit known as the Agra summit with a view to improving Indo-Pak relations. However, this attempt could not achieve much success for India as Musharraf declined to leave aside the Kashmir issue.



Vajpayee's peace initiative with Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif

In December 2001, the Vajpayee regime witnessed an attack on Parliament House, New Delhi by a group of Pakistan-trained terrorists. Though they managed to kill several security guards, they ultimately failed in their attempts against the Indian Security forces. In the aftermath of this attack, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002 was enacted. On the brighter side, Vajpayee launched Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan with the aim of universalisation of elementary education in the same year (2001).

In 2002, the Godhra train tragedy took place. In February 2002, a train filled with Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya stopped in the town of Godhra, Gujarat and a scuffle broke between Muslim residents and Hindu activists. Amidst uncertain circumstances, the train was set on fire leading to the death of 59 people. The charred bodies of the victims were displayed in public in the city of Ahmedabad, and a statewide strike was called by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Gujarat, evoking anti-Muslim sentiments. The rampaging Hindu mobs blamed the Muslims for the deaths and killed Muslim men and women, destroying homes and places of worship. The state government was criticised for mishandling the situation and was accused of not doing anything to stop the violence, but rather encouraging it.

Vajpayee as the Prime Minister was pained when the communal riots broke out. He himself travelled to Gujarat, visiting Godhra and Ahmedabad – the site of the most violent riots – and announced financial aid for victims, urging an end to the violence.

In 2002-03, the Vajpayee government implemented several economic reforms resulting in a record growth rate of 7% in the nation's GDP. The government reformed the tax system, increased the pace of reforms and pro-business initiatives and encouraged major irrigation and housing schemes. From the modernization of public and industrial infrastructure to urban modernization and expansion, job creation, a rising high tech and IT industry to the increasing foreign investment, the international image of the nation improved due to the rapid development that took place during this period.

Retirement:

According to news reports, a tussle within the BJP was witnessed in the year 2003 regarding leadership between Vajpayee and deputy prime minister LK Advani. The then BJP President Venkaiah Naidu instead suggested that LK Advani lead the party politically at the 2004 General Elections.

However, the 2004 General Elections brought about the downfall of the NDA while the Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) rose to power. Vajpayee refused to take up the position of the Leader of the Opposition, thus paving the way for LK Advani's leadership of BJP. However, he remained the chairman of NDA.

In December 2005, Vajpayee announced his retirement from active politics, declaring that he would not contest in the next Parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in 2009.

Personal life:

Vajpayee chose to stay a bachelor for his entire life and adopted Namita Bhattacharya, daughter of his longtime friend Rajkumari Kaul and BN Kaul and raised Namita as his own child. He was very close to his friends and relatives.

He was a noted poet and mainly wrote in Hindi. With regard to his poetry, he wrote, "My poetry is a declaration of War, not an exordium to defeat. It is not the dispirited voice of dejection but the stirring shout of victory."

Major works:

- During Vajpayee's tenure, the five nuclear tests were conducted at Pokhran in 1998 which unambiguously established India as a nuclear state. Moreover, the country was able to develop a minimum credible deterrence to ward off threats to its security.
- Vajpayee also advocated peace and friendship with Pakistan by initiating the Delhi-Lahore bus service. The Lahore Declaration is a classic example through which he aimed for friendship and better relationship between the two nations.
- The victory of the infamous Kargil War and his diplomacy and leadership while dissolving the political issues during the war further strengthened Vajpayee's political image among the common people and proved him as one of the wise and capable leaders of India.
- Vajpayee is highly respected for the economic reforms and privatisation policies that he brought about during his tenure as the Prime Minister of India. The two major projects of his time that were very close to his heart were :-
 - The National Highways Development Project (NHDP) – connecting the four major cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.
 - Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) – a nationwide plan to provide good road connectivity to unconnected villages in all weather conditions.
- Improved relationship between China and India. Vajpayee visited China in July 2003 and met with various Chinese leaders. He recognised Tibet as a part of China, which was welcomed by the Chinese leadership, which resulted in the recognition of Sikkim as a part of India by them.



Vajpayee with Chinese Delegates

Literary works:

Vajpayee was a great admirer of poetry and wrote several poems. His love for literature urged him to write poems and prose. He authored several works, both prose and poetry. In addition, various collections of his speeches, articles and slogans were made.

Prose:

- National Integration, 1961
- New Dimensions of India's Foreign Policy, 1979
- Kucha Lekha, Kucha Bhashana, 1996
- Bindu- Bindu Vicara, 1997
- Sankalp-Kaal, 1999
- Decisive Days, 1999
- Vicara- Bindu (Hindi Edition), 2000
- India's Perspectives on ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Region, 2003

Poetry:

- Kaidi Kavirai Ki Kundalian, a collection of poems written when he was imprisoned during the emergency in 1975-77
- Amar Aag Hai, 1994
- Meri Ikyavana Kavitaen, 1995
- Kya Khoya Kya Paya : Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Vyaktitva Aur Kavitaen, 1999
- Values, Vision & Verses of Vajpayee: India's Man of Destiny, 2001
- Twenty- One Poems, 2003
- Chuni Hui Kavitaeyin, 2012.

In 2013, an English translation of a selection of some of Vajpayee's Hindi poetry was published.

Awards and honours:

- In 1992, he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award in India for his distinguished contribution in public affairs.
- In 1993, he was awarded the D. Litt. from Kanpur University.
- In 1994, he was awarded the Lokmanya Tilak Award and Outstanding Parliamentarian Award
- In 1994, he again was awarded with the Bharat Ratna Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant Award
- In 2015, Vajpayee was honoured with the Bharat Ratna, the highest Civilian Award of the Republic of India
- In 2015, he was also honoured with the Bangladesh Liberation War Award (Bangladesh Muktiyuddho Sanmanona)

Death:

Vajpayee had a long history of illness. He underwent knee replacement surgery in 2001. His health condition had been a major source of concern after he suffered from a stroke which impaired his speech abilities in 2009. Vajpayee also suffered from diabetes and dementia. In the last few years of his life, he was confined to a wheel chair and stopped recognising people. On 11 June 2018, his health condition started getting worse and was admitted to AIIMS in a critical condition following a kidney infection.

On 16 August 2018, at the age of 93, Vajpayee was officially declared dead at 5:05 pm IST due to prolonged illness. Thus, India lost one of the greatest political personalities of his time.

Trivia:

- During a speech in the Rajya Sabha, former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh referred Vajpayee as the *Bhishma Pitamah* of Indian Politics, a reference made to a mythological figure in the Hindu epic Mahabharata.
- Vajpayee was the only Parliamentarian elected from four different states at different times namely UP, MP, Gujarat and Delhi.
- He became the first person to deliver a speech in Hindi at the UN General Assembly.