PROFILE OF INDIA

SIZE: 1.27 million square miles. A little more than 1/3 the size of the US.

POPULATION: 1.13 billion, second largest population on earth (CIA 2007)

RELIGION: Hindu, 80.5%, Muslim, 13.4%, Christian, 2.3%, Sikh, 1.9%, other an unspecified, 1.9%

ETHNIC GROUPS: Indo-Aryan, 72%, Dravidian, 25%, Mongoloid and other, 3% (CIA 2000)

LANGUAGES: Hindi is the national language, spoken by 30%; English is used in political and commercial communication; there are 14 other official languages, including Bengali, Sanskrit, Tamil, Urdu, Malayalam, Punjabi, Kashmiri and Sindhi.

LITERACY: Adults, 61% (UN Development Report, 2004). Enrollment of school-age children has declined in the past year (“India the Superpower? Think again,” by Cait Murphy, Assistant Managing Editor, Fortune, Feb. 9, 2007)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 7.8% (CIA, 2006); only 10% of the labor force works in the “formal” economy, and fewer than half of those work in the private sector.

POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY: In 2007, about 20% of the population is chronically hungry, and half the world’s hungry people live in India. More than 25% of the population lives on less than $1 per day. Among children under age 5, 47% are either malnourished or their growth is stunted. (Sources: UN Development Program, UNICEF, World Food Program, “India the Superpower? Think again,” by Cait Murphy, Assistant Managing Editor, Fortune, February 9, 2007)

GEOGRAPHY and CLIMATE: From the Himalayan mountains in the north, to the Thar desert in the northwest, and fertile farmland in the south, the Indian subcontinent has a range of landscapes and climate zones, ranging from frigid in the mountains, to arid and dry in desert zones. Although much of India is above the Tropic of Cancer, the entire country is regarded as tropical. The most dominant feature element of climate is the monsoon season, from June to September, which brings torrential rain and widespread flooding in two waves, one from the southwest, and the second from the east, involving the entire subcontinent by early July.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: Industrial pollution, soil erosion, water pollution and damage related to monsoons are overshadowed by chronic problems of lack of infrastructure, overuse and misuse of resources, leaving 10% of the population without access to potable water.
BACKGROUND: INDIA

The Indus River, from which comes the name “India”, is part of a network of five rivers that form in the Himalayan mountains to the northeast. The network of rivers is collectively called the Punjab, which forms a fertile agricultural region stretching from northwestern India and Pakistan into central Asia. Civilizations flourished along these rivers five thousand years ago, where more than 1,000 cities have been excavated.

**Growth of commerce along trade routes.** Thriving commercial and cultural centers developed along overland trade routes, such as the Silk Road, extending from China in the east, through northern India to the Middle East and North Africa. With trade came cultural influences and innovations. Buddhism, which originated in India, traveled the Silk Road to China. Islam, Zoroastrianism and Christianity came to India from the Middle East more than a thousand years ago. Four of five Indians are Hindu, but the country is also home to more than one hundred million Muslims, making India the third largest Muslim country in the world.

Trade with Europeans gained momentum after Vasco da Gama navigated a sea route around the southern tip of Africa, in 1498, to India and the Spice Islands. By the 18th century, Indian textiles and spices had found markets with Portuguese, British, Dutch and Danish trading companies. Of these traders, the British East India Company was dominant by the mid-18th century, and the subcontinent was colonized by the British over the next two hundred years. When the British arrived, the South Asian subcontinent was ruled by Mughal emperors, whose reign extended as far north as present-day Afghanistan and east to Burma, having established a highly centralized government linking cultural, ethnic and religious groups throughout the subcontinent. The empire of the Mughals, which was known for its spectacular architecture, in particular the Taj Mahal, fell into decline, in part from local rebellions and a vanishing treasury. Without centralized leadership, the region evolved into a patchwork of princely states with few ties to the emperor. By the mid-19th century, the British assumed control of India, as a colony of the British Empire. The British maintained the princely states, preserving ancestral cultures, including the many customs and beliefs of the Hindu and Muslim ways of life.

**Gandhi and the independence movement.** There was opposition to the British Raj from before its founding in 1858; by the early 20th century, there were independence movements among both Hindu and Muslim groups. Hindu nationalist groups, in particular the Indian National Congress Party, wanted a secular state, tolerating the many religious and ethnic communities who lived side by side for centuries on the subcontinent. From 1920, the Congress Party was led by Mohandes Gandhi, whose belief in the dignity of every person and philosophy of non-violent resistance derived from his experience fighting for the civil rights of the Indian community living in South Africa.

Known in India as the Father of the Nation, he is called Mahatma Gandhi, *mahatma* in Sanskrit meaning “great soul”. Gandhi led the Congress Party in its campaign for social and economic reforms that would support the vision of a self-sustaining, independent India. He and his second in command, Jawaharlal Nehru, were jailed repeatedly by the British for their non-violent resistance to British authority.

Gandhi in 1931, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.
URL:  http://www.photokunst.com/art/gandhi_big.jpg
Partition. Muslim groups formed the Muslim League, promoting a separate Islamic state. By the end of World War II, when it became clear that the British would be leaving the region, the Muslim League called for a three-tiered proposal that would have divided the subcontinent into groups of provinces along religious and ethnic lines. Gandhi was bitterly opposed to this partition of the region, which he believed would open wounds among the region’s many religious and ethnic groups that might never heal. When Nehru was elected president of the Congress Party in 1946, he announced that he could not support the Muslim three-tiered proposal. In the Punjab region, uncertainty and frustration with the stalled political process led to violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

A new plan, to partition the region into a secular India and Islamic Pakistan, was drawn up by the British in the summer of 1947. As the Punjab dissolved into riots and near civil war, the British accelerated the date of India’s independence from 1948 to August of 1947, ending negotiations and making partition inevitable. Scholars point out that South Asia was always a land of many cultures living side by side; partition along religious and ethnic lines inevitably made enemies of friends and neighbors.

An independent India could no longer rely on British authorities, who left the subcontinent soon after India’s independence, creating a leadership vacuum that led to further chaos and despair across the region. Millions of people were uprooted from their ancestral homes, and relocated to regions they knew nothing about, based on their religious or ethnic traditions. Reports of atrocities continue to appear decades later, as India and Pakistan confront the long aftermath of civil conflict. As Gandhi feared, partition of the region into a secular India and Islamic Pakistan set the stage for three wars and nearly continuous religious and ethnic conflicts over the next sixty years. He could not have foreseen the more serious threat: the danger of nuclear confrontation between the two countries.

The legacy of partition. When Nehru became the new Indian republic’s first prime minister in 1947, he faced many challenges familiar to other newly-independent states: a stagnant economy, very low rates of literacy, and for millions of people, a life expectancy of less than 40 years. Neither India nor Pakistan had the resources to cope with the widespread suffering and dislocation of partition; the destabilizing effects of this traumatic period continue to haunt both countries. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, by a Hindu radical; since independence, two Indian prime ministers have been assassinated and thousands of Hindus and Muslims have been killed in ethnic and religious conflict.

India today. In the early 1990s, the Hindu nationalist party BJP defeated the more conservative Congress party in national elections. Shifting government expenditures away from the vast majority of rural poor, the BJP government focused on opening markets and building urban middle classes. The BJP government provoked the nuclear standoff of 1998, exploding five nuclear weapons in the desert northwest, near the Pakistani border.

India today is a land of contradictions. The largest democracy on earth, India is home to more than half the world’s hungry people. The bustling cities of Bangalore, Hyderabad and Gurgaon support multinational companies with software developers and call centers, but more than 100,000 Indian farmers committed suicide over the past decade, in despair over failing crops and debt. India’s urban populations increasingly benefit from the globalizing impact of international markets, technology and telecommunications. But the country continues to struggle to address chronic issues of poverty, disease and unemployment which affect the vast majority of its people.
REFERENCES FROM THE FILM

**Bhagavad Gita.** The *Bhagavad Gita* is an ancient Indian text written in Sanskrit, probably dating from the fifth to second centuries BC. The *Gita* is part of the great epic *Mahabharata,* “the great tale of the Bharata Dynasty,” a central Hindu text. *Bhagavad Gita* means “Song of God” in the ancient Sanskrit language. It is written in 18 chapters, as a dialogue in verse form, between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna, who is a divine incarnation of the supreme deity, Vishnu. Prince Arjuna is one of five brothers who must confront their relatives on a battlefield of civil war. He is filled with doubt and foreboding, and he turns in anguish to Lord Krishna, who appears as his guide and charioteer. In the course of the *Gita,* Lord Krishna reveals himself to Arjuna as the presence of the divine in the human soul. His discourse with Arjuna, on the nature of the soul, on human responsibility and work, is the “Song of God” that allows Arjuna to have a glimpse of his ultimate essence in the universe.

The drama group at Arjun’s school rehearses a portion of Chapter 1 of the *Bhagavad Gita,* “Lamenting the Consequences of War,” as Prince Arjuna cries out to Lord Krishna in his moment of doubt. In Verses 28-35, the Prince despairs of the terrible loss of life to come, and throws down his weapons:

28. Arjuna was overcome with great compassion
And sorrowfully said:
O Krishna, seeing my kinsmen standing
With a desire to fight,

29. My limbs fail and my mouth becomes dry.
My body quivers
And my hairs stand on end.

30. The bow, Gaandeeva, slips from my hand
And my skin intensely burns.
My head turns, I am unable to stand steady

31. And, O Krishna, I see bad omens.
I see no use of killing my kinsmen in battle.

32. I desire neither victory
Nor pleasure nor kingdom, O Krishna.
What is the use of the kingdom,
Or enjoyment, or even life, O Krishna?

33. Because all those, for whom we desire kingdom,
Enjoyments, and pleasures,
Are standing here for the battle,
Giving up their lives and wealth.

34. Teachers, uncles, sons, grandfathers,
Maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons,
Brothers-in-law, and other relatives.

35. I do not wish to kill them,
Who are also about to kill,
Even for the sovereignty of the three worlds,
Let alone for this earthly kingdom, O Krishna.

Source:  http://www.santosha.com/philosophy/gita-chapter1.html

Source:  http://www.harshasatsangh.com/ Harsh_K_Luthar/ 2006/Krishna/1.htm
Dubai and expatriate workers. Dubai is a city-state, much like Singapore; it is one of the seven states in the United Arab Emirates, along with Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain. Once a collection of sheikdoms that made their living on shipping and pearls, the states were valued by the British for their location in the Persian Gulf. Through a series of shipping treaties the states became British protectorates; after the British left the region, the states formed the United Arab Emirates in 1971, a loose federation established as an independent state, with Abu Dhabi as its capital and Dubai as its largest city.

In 1958, oil was discovered off the coast of Abu Dhabi, dramatically changing the economy and vitality of the region. Starting then and continuing today, oil workers were hired from outside the Emirates; the growing oil wealth sparked a construction boom, especially in Dubai, and the stream of workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia became a flood. Today, expatriate workers make up 80% of the population of the United Arab Emirates.

Workers come to the Emirates from poor countries, hoping to earn enough to support their families back home. However, most workers must pay an “agent” as much as $3,000 for a work visa, often borrowing money to make this payment. With income averaging $175 per month for backbreaking labor to build and maintain Dubai's fabulous shopping centers, airport and skyscrapers, most workers have so little money left for their families that they might have done better to find work at home.

Conditions for the workers in Dubai are a growing cause of concern. Packed as many as twelve to a single room in makeshift desert housing, with unsafe water and no sanitation, workers have staged riots in recent years, attempting to draw the attention of tourists to the plight of the people who build their glamorous hotels and attractions. Suicides and workers injured or killed on the job are reported in news outlets and trade publications worldwide, with the result that construction companies have begun to address conditions of forced labor on their projects. Meanwhile, the Emirates have established “amnesty” programs, requiring people whose visas have expired either to register with the government or leave the Emirates, in an attempt to reduce the number of undocumented workers streaming into the Persian Gulf in search of work.

Kashmir. Kashmir is the name given to a collection of culturally distinct regions north of what is now India, and east of what is now Pakistan. The population is predominantly Muslim, but there are also significant Hindu, Sikh, and other cultural and ethnic communities. Under British colonial rule, Kashmir was one of more than 500 princely states ruled by a Maharaja; although the region was earlier ruled by Sikhs, the British installed a Hindu ruler in the mid-19th century. A century later, in the crisis of partition, the Hindu leader of Kashmir could not decide whether to be part of the Islamic state of Pakistan, or the secular state of India. The partition agreement assigned Kashmir to India, and the region exploded in violence, rioting and murder.

The war of 1947-1948 was the first of three intense struggles between...
India and Pakistan over Kashmir; the war in 1965 ended in ceasefire, and the 1971 war ended in defeat for Pakistan, which lost its eastern territory when the newly-independent state of Bangladesh was formed.

Pakistan regards Kashmir – with its heavy majority of Muslims – as rightfully theirs; India points to the partition agreement for its claim. For Kashmiris, their ancestral home is a valley of spectacular beauty, a region that has suffered through centuries of conquest. Since 1947, insurgencies, armed and supported by Pakistan, have fought insurgesicies answering to the government of India; some describe Kashmir as an “unending war”. Tensions have eased little since the war in 1971; following the exchange of underground nuclear tests in 1998 by India and Pakistan, the United States and other countries were alarmed that Kashmir could be a flashpoint for nuclear war in South Asia. India and Pakistan signed agreements to “intensify their efforts to resolve all issues” without recourse to a nuclear showdown.


Underground nuclear tests. Let the Wind Blow is set in May 1998; its opening scenes show TV reports of three nuclear weapons tests, which actually occurred, at India’s Pokhran underground test site. India had not conducted nuclear tests for 24 years; the 1998 tests were authorized only two days after the government of Pakistan test-fired missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The world was stunned by the timing of these tests. Although neither country is thought to have an arsenal sufficient to destroy the other’s military capability, their weapons could be effectively used to cripple major cities. In India they say, “We have 7 cities, they have only 2.” While India professes a “no first strike policy,” both India and Pakistan declare that they will maintain a “first strike capability.”
The risk of nuclear war between India and Pakistan escalated during the 1990s, but both countries had been hard at work on nuclear technology for decades.

“Atoms for Peace”. India began to develop a nuclear power capability in the 1950s, under the “Atoms for Peace” program, acquiring a reactor from Canada and heavy water from the United States. The government conducted a “peaceful nuclear explosion” in 1974, but by the 1980s India had begun to acquire technology for a thermonuclear weapon, at least partly in response to China’s nuclear weapons program. Pakistan acquired technology from Canada and France under the “Atoms for Peace” program, following the humiliating loss of its eastern region in the war of 1971. Pakistan’s program gained significant momentum with the return home of one of its scientists.

Dr. A. Q. Khan. Dr. Khan is a Pakistani metallurgist who learned how to make highly-enriched uranium in Europe. Khan brought home the technology, and established a discreet network for acquiring materials and equipment. By the late 1980s, Pakistan was believed to have enough fuel for a nuclear weapon. By the 1990s, there was evidence that Pakistan was exploring plutonium as a nuclear fuel.

April 1998: the sword of the Prophet Mohammed. Pakistan’s Ghauri missile has a range of more than 900 miles and can carry a nuclear or conventional warhead. When Pakistan successfully fired the missile in April 1998, the designator Hatf-V was added to its name – Hatf, meaning “deadly”, was the name of the Prophet Mohammed’s sword. Two days after the missile fired, India authorized a series of nuclear weapons tests, to be conducted in May.

May 11-13, 1998: India tests a thermonuclear weapon. Called Shakti 1, this was India’s first test of a thermonuclear weapon, one of five weapons tested underground on May 11-13, 1998. The other weapons were smaller, and there are questions as to the success of the detonation, but minimum estimates put the yield for Shakti 1 at 12-25 kilotons of power (the bomb detonated over Nagasaki in 1945 generated 21 kilotons of power). The story in Let the Wind Blow unfolds on the day India publicly announced these tests.

May 28-30, 1998: Pakistan responds. After a series of warnings that India’s nuclear tests would not go unchallenged, Pakistan announced on May 28th that it had successfully tested five nuclear weapons – the same number India had announced earlier in May. While Pakistan’s claims are difficult to verify, seismic reports confirm at least two and possibly a third underground nuclear test

“Today we have settled a score.” On May 28, 1998, the Prime Minister of Pakistan opened his announcement of the successful nuclear tests by stating, “Today, we have settled a score.” According to numerous sources, Pakistan believed there would be an air strike against its nuclear facilities the night before, and it threatened a “befitting response.”
Concerns were raised again in the crisis of December 2001, when five gunmen launched a suicide attack on the Indian parliament. Both India and Pakistan raised the specter of nuclear war in the days and weeks following the attack. India relocated missiles, severed road and rail links with Pakistan and denied landing rights to Pakistani airplanes, and Pakistan threatened that any small action “would trigger a chain of action and reaction, leading to a conflict that neither side desires.”

Both countries have refused to sign treaties either banning nuclear tests, or agreeing to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Neither country is obliged to admit inspectors or to provide information about their nuclear arsenals. Although India is militarily stronger than Pakistan, both countries have substantial military strength apart from the growing nuclear threat, and they conduct missile systems tests regularly.

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