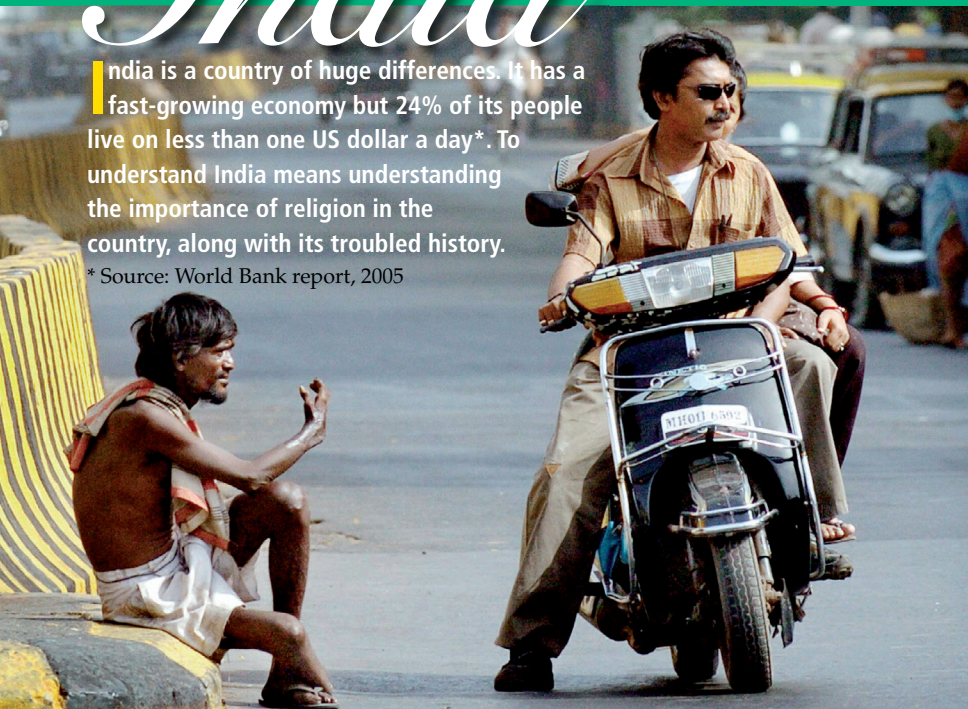


India

India is a country of huge differences. It has a fast-growing economy but 24% of its people live on less than one US dollar a day*. To understand India means understanding the importance of religion in the country, along with its troubled history.

* Source: World Bank report, 2005



Hinduism

Hinduism is India's main religion. Approximately 82% of the country is Hindu. There are over 330 million Hindu gods. Hindus choose the gods they want to follow, and worship them at temples.

A Hindu festival, Mumbai



Reincarnation and the caste system

Hindus believe in reincarnation – when you die, you are born again, and if you live a good life, your next life will be better. Hindus believe that they are born into one of four groups ('castes'). The lowest caste were often treated very badly by people in higher castes. Today, laws are in place to give equal rights to those in lower castes, but the caste system still exists, especially outside the cities.

British India

In the 1600s, England started trading with India. The East India Trading Company established trading stations all over India. They mainly traded in tea and cotton. By the early 1800s, India was completely under British rule.

Gandhi and independence

By the start of the 20th century, many Indians wanted independence from Britain. A man called Gandhi played an important part in India's fight for independence. Gandhi believed that people of all religions and castes were equal and he wanted to achieve an independent India, through peaceful protest.

But Gandhi couldn't get independence peacefully. An independent India meant



Mahatma Gandhi, 1946

What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.

economy temple trade / trading independence / independent
protest divide worship

Picking tea in India, 1880



a Hindu India and many Muslims wanted their own Muslim state. In 1947, the decision was made to divide the country into two parts – one for Muslims (the new country of Pakistan) and one for Hindus. Gandhi knew this would be terrible for India and he was right. It was no longer safe for Muslims and Hindus to live in the same areas. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed as they tried to escape from their homes.

Some Hindus did not agree with Gandhi because he believed in helping all religions, including Muslims. In 1948, Gandhi was shot dead by a Hindu.

Today, India is a free country, but there are still many problems between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Find out more at: www.mkgandhi.org
www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism

Is there anything similar about India and your own country?