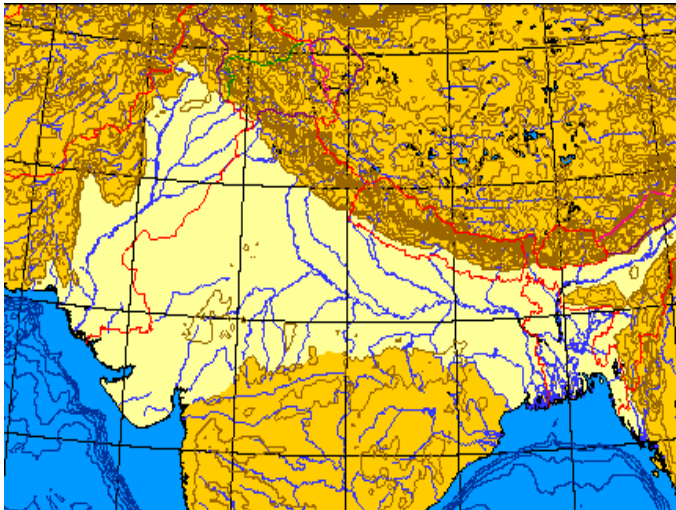
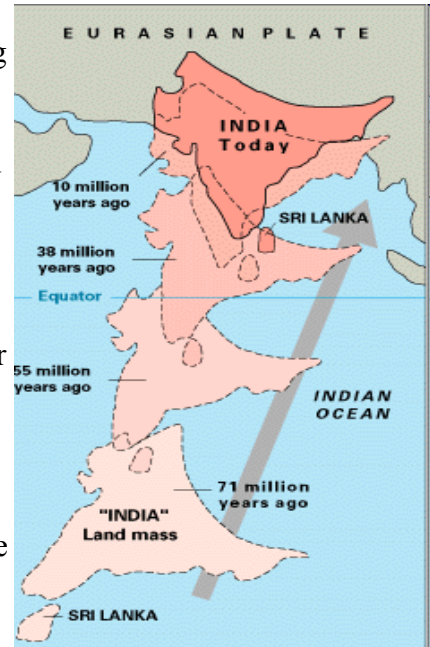


India in Context

The sub-continent of India was formed by the (geologically speaking) high-speed collision of the India plate with the Eurasian plate, creating the Himalayas, the world's highest, and one of its youngest, mountain ranges. This massive mountain barrier shields India from the harsh climate of Eurasia, feeds the great river systems of northern India, and shapes the monsoon climate that dominates the country.

India occupies 2.4% of the world's land area and supports over 17.5% of the world's population. (With 1.1 billion people, India packs almost four times as many people into an area only 35% as large as the U.S.) India's population is also much younger than the U.S., with 33% under the age of 15 (compared with 20.8% in the U.S.) and only 7.1% over 60 (compared with 16.6% here).

India has more arable land area than any country except the United States, and more water area than any country except Canada and the United States. Indian life, therefore revolves mostly around agriculture and allied activities in small villages, where the overwhelming majority of Indians live. As per the 2001 census, 72.2% of the population lives in about 638,000 villages and the remaining 27.8% lives in over 5,100 towns and over 380 urban agglomerations.



The Indo-Gangetic belt (or “Great Plains”), including much of Pakistan, northern India and Bangladesh, is the world's most extensive expanse of uninterrupted alluvium formed by the deposition of silt by the numerous rivers. The plains are flat and mostly treeless, making it conducive for irrigation through canals. The area is also rich in ground water sources.

The plains are one of the world's most intensely farmed areas. The main crops grown are rice and wheat, which are grown in rotation. Others include maize, sugarcane and cotton. The Indo-Gangetic plains rank among the world's most densely populated areas.

India has more than two thousand ethnic groups, and every major religion is represented, as are four major families of languages. Only the continent of Africa exceeds the linguistic, genetic and cultural diversity of the nation of India. Depending on how one differentiates between languages and dialects, India has hundreds of mother tongues, with 29 languages spoken by more than a million people. 70% of the people speak an Indo-Aryan language such as Hindi, the official language spoken by some 40% of the population, while another 22% speak one of the Dravidian languages of southern India. Historically, Persian and English have played important roles as “contact languages”.

The Republic of India is the largest democracy in the world, with a parliamentary system of government modeled after the British system. The federal union is composed of 28 states and 7 union territories. India also has a reputation of being one of the most bureaucratic governments in the world.