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FNU 212 Culture and Diversity in Food and Culture

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## India

India, the seventh largest country in the world, is a diverse country filled with 1 billion people, about 15% of the earth's population, scattered all over climates of hot and cold land that envelops mountains such as the Himalayas or "house of snow", plains, called the Indo-Gangetic, the Deccan Plateau, and desserts. The triangular shaped land is surrounded by the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean. It nestles its 1, 269, 344 square miles of land near the countries of Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan (Kittler/Sucher 441 & Swan 131).

Religion holds great importance to the people of India. Not only does it denote history, but it shapes the peoples daily live to how they behave, dress, and eat. Hinduism is the dominant religion practiced in India by 84% of the people (culturalindia.net). Hindi's believe that human and animal spirits live forever and come back to earth in a physical form many times moving up and down the hierarchy based on one's behavior during the lifetime, known as reincarnation or karma (culturalindia.net). The citizens of India refer to an unspoken system of characterization of people know as the Caste System. Each person is born into a class or group such as the Brahmans (Priests), Kshatriyas (Soldiers), Vaisyas (Merchants or Farmers), and Sudras (Serfs). There is even a class so low called the Untouchables. The main scriptures of Hinduism are the Mahabharata; a political work, Ramayana; holy myths, Vedas; religious writings of

hymns, chants, and mantras, Upanishads; Vedanta philosophy, and the Bhagavad-Gita; an epic poem of morals (Boone/Kirk 3). Islam seconds the religious makeup of the country followed by Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Christianity.

The sounds of India through vocal expression are enormous! The government recognizes 15 official languages, but 300 are actually spoken and 700 tongues of dialect can be heard (Kittler/Sucher). The most ancient language and possibly the oldest in the world is Sanskrit or the “language of the Gods” because it has been said that the Gods understand and communicate in this language. Translated as perfectly constructed speech Sanskrit is considered a “natural” language due to its representation of fundamental tones and sounds of the world and nature (Boone/Kirk 22). Sanskrit is of sacred origin due to the preservation of the use of chanting at ceremonies like births, weddings, deaths, and rituals and through the sounds spoken by the many generations of readings of Vedic hymns. Hindi is the most frequently spoken, followed by English as a bridging language. The English Language Learners Website states that there are 1,678 Indian speaking people ([www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us)).

Although different languages are spoken, the eclectic people of India celebrate common holidays and festivities, such as Republic Day on January 26<sup>th</sup>, Independence Day on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Diwali in October or November, depending in the lunar calendar, Holi, in February or March, Raksha Bandhan, and Ramadan. During the celebrations and typical days, natives of India, who like to snack rather than devour large meals, eat a balance of hot and cold food. Since most of the people are vegetarians because cows are considered sacred, staple foods like rice, grown mostly in the south, and wheat, harvested in the north, are eaten among yogurts, fruits, vegetables, and spicy spreads called dhal

Making Dhal is a simple procedure, but highly valued in a typical Indian kitchen. While the lentils are cooking in water for about a half hour the onion and garlic are fried in butter, or ghee, until golden in color. Coriander, turmeric, cumin, chili pepper, and salt are mixed together with vinegar making a thick paste and later added to the fried onion and garlic to be cooked together until the room is bursting with pungent aromas! Once the lentils are cooked, they may be added to the paste mixture until warm. The Dhal is versatile in its uses. It may be served in soups, rice, or on Naan, the flat bread of India.

Like many other countries the men are considered the head of the house, being served first for meals, working outside the home, and maintaining the house's structure. But the women have an important role as well having a tendency to attribute vocally the demands of chores and household opinions, cooking, and washing clothes. It is common to see all members of the family of any age group sharing chores and living together under one roof (Swan 118).

According to Christy Turlington, author of; Living Yoga: Creating a life Practice, the Sanskrit word Auyrveda literally means "life knowledge". Auyrveda is an ancient system of medicine or complete system of health for the mind, body, and spirit as Turlington states. This holistic practice of optimum health says there are five elements if nature: earth, water, fire, air, and space that coexist within each living organism on the planet. Of these five elements, three elements known as doshas predominate the human body: earth; Kapha, which is a combination of water and earth, Pitta; fire or a combination of fire and water, and Vata; air (168). The doshas are qualities characterized by the personality and nature that creates balances or imbalances in the body that depend

on a variety of things such as environment, diet, stress, general state of being, and sleep  
(Turlington 170).